VISIONS

The Magazine of Fantasy TV, Home Video & New Media™

Volume 1 Number 1
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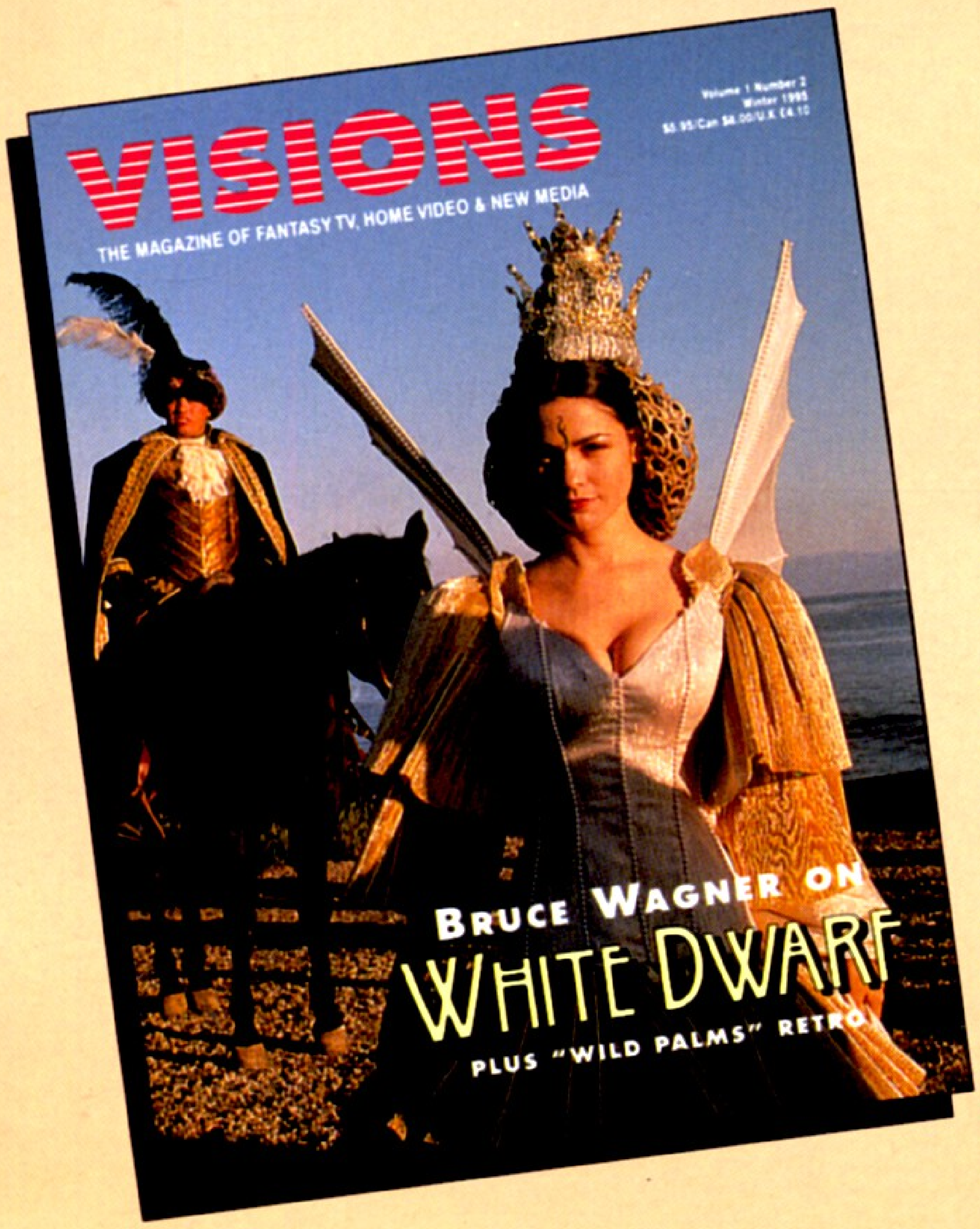

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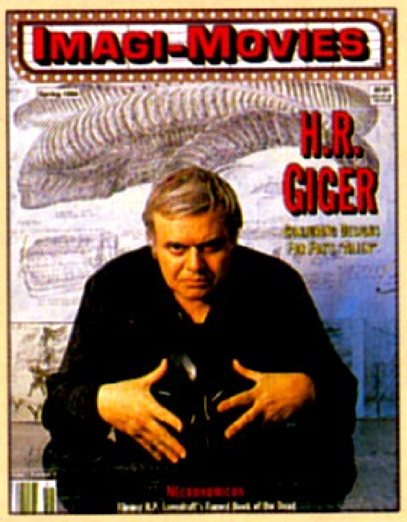
Don't miss Issue #2. Our cover story is WHITE DWARF, the wild new fantasy program from Oscar-winner Francis Ford Coppola and WILD PALM's creator Bruce Wagner. We have an on-the-set, behind-the-scenes report and interviews with Wagner, the director and actors. *Visions* also talks to Wagner about WILD PALMS (which he made with Oscar-winner Oliver Stone). Issue #2 will examine the "Changing Roles of Women in Fantasy Television" from BEWITCHED and I DREAM OF JEANNIE to EARTH 2 and STAR TREK: VOYAGER; plus, the latest CD-ROM releases, home video gems and reviews galore. *Visions* also covers today's hottest animation on television and home video and every issue will re-visit classic television programs.

Visions follows the same high-quality format of *Cinefantastique, Imagi-Movies* and *Femme Fatales*—large 8 1/2"x11" in size, printed on glossy paper, 64 pages each issue, with stunning full-color photography and design. Sign up as a charter subscriber now and select any one of the collector's back issues of *Imagi-Movies* offered here as our free gift! And our charter subscription rate of $18 for four quarterly issues saves you $6 off the newsstand price of $5.95 per issue.



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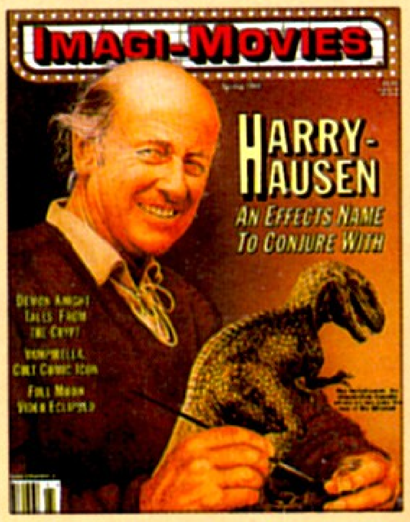

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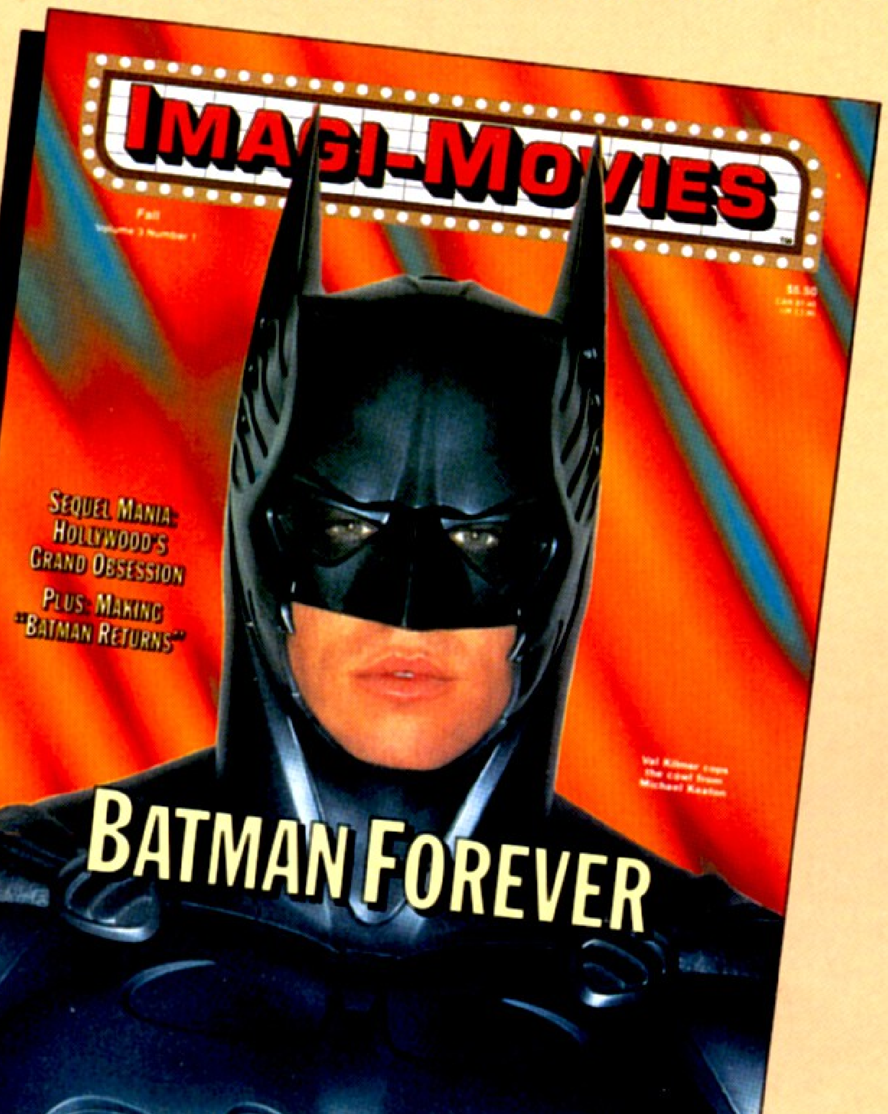
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Don't miss our next exhaustive on-the-set report of the making of BATMAN FOREVER, starring Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones and Jim Carrey. Find out how dark the new Dark Knight will be now that Joel Schumacher has taken over the director's reins from Tim Burton, who abandoned the series in favor of making a CATWOMAN movie instead. Plus, an extensive look back at BATMAN RETURNS, the quirky 1992 sequel that surpassed the stolid original.

Also next issue, the making of CONGO, a behind-the-scenes look at adapting Michael Crichton's best-selling lost world adventure to the big screen; "Sequel Mania:" an examination of Hollywood's obsession with Roman numerals; retrospectives on the history of Mexican Fantasy Cinema and the career of '50s sci-fi stalwart Beverly Garland; and our usual exhaustive review section on cinema, laser and video.

While striving to remain on the cutting edge of what's new in the genre, we also provide the kind of "Classic Coverage" that serious devotees of the genre have been demanding: reviews of all films in current release; profiles of actors, writers and directors with a proven talent for producing quality work; and retrospectives of the classics that sparked our initial interest in imaginative cinema.

Subscribe to the next four quarterly issues of *Imagi-Movies* for just $18, a savings of almost $6 off the newsstand price of $5.95 and select your rare back issue from among those pictured and described above. Also subscribe to *Visions* and take two!!

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Channel Surfing

By Anthony P. Montesano

On the eve of Halloween in 1938, Orson Welles and the Mercury Star Theater players launched a radio broadcast of H. G. Welles' *War of the Worlds* that convinced a country, whose sensibilities were beaten by the Great Depression, that Martians had landed. That night—despite disclaimers during the program, mass panic ensued and people actually died in the confusion. It's now 56 years later, we're on the verge of a new communications era, and we fancy ourselves more sophisticated than Americans in 1938. Right?

On the eve of Halloween, October 30, 1994, CBS aired the TV movie *Without Warning* and once again proved the power of the medium. This time, however it wasn't Martians, it was asteroids which were supposedly crash landing. Even though *Without Warning* was advertised as a TV movie in *TV Guide*, the realistic nature of the presentation (real news anchors were hired as actors and the movie was shot documentary style in video) still convinced people the story was real. So much for the communication age. The network was flooded with calls from frantic viewers asking if the fictional reports were real. So much for our sophistication.

Television has that kind of power. It invades our space, our homes, sometimes our minds. It informs our opinions and confirms our suspicions.

More than ever the fantasy genre (including science fiction and horror) has taken over television. With the advent of new media, television itself has become part of that genre.

There's never been a better time for a publication like VISIONS. We hope you, the reader, agree. VISIONS will concentrate on fantasy television, home video and new media. We'll leave the theatrical feature films to our sister publications CINEFANTASTIQUE and IMAGI-MOVIES.

Each issue of VISIONS will feature on-going departments. **ScreenPolitic** will explore the connection between fantasy tv and social issues; **FutureScreen** will offer a glimpse into a project in development. This issue we talk to the ex-producers of the *X-Files* about their new show, *Space*. Every issue, **RetroScreen** will take a look back at classic tv. **VideoScreen** will be space for independent, low-budget direct-to-video projects. **CyberScreen** will cover the exciting new world of new media. This issue offers a triple treat: *Reboot*, *The Mask CD-ROM* and *Wing Commander III*.

Most of all, VISIONS will cover the visionary minds of the industry. What better way to start than our first cover on Walt Disney?

Mickey, thanks for giving him to us.

VISIONS

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FutureScreen

BY PAULA VITARIS

SPACE

The New Program from the Producers of The X-Files

Is it time for a new *Space* age? The Fox Network thinks so, and gave the green light for filming to begin late this winter on a pilot for a television series that will bring a galactic-scale war to the small screen. At the helm of *Space* is the writing and producing team of James Wong and Glen Morgan, who departed Fox's *The X-Files* after a year and a half to take creative control, for the first time, of their own show. They have embarked on a project of epic proportions: the script takes its large ensemble cast to locations that span the cosmos, ranging from Earth, Mars, Jupiter and beyond to distant solar systems. And when war against a mysterious alien race breaks out, a pitched space battle takes place that will involve some of the most complicated special effects ever created for television. Filming commenced in late February at the Village Roadshow Studios near Brisbane, Australia, and will last for six weeks.

With all the science fiction shows popping up on television these days, Morgan and Wong hope that *Space* will stand out not only for the elaborate SFX and hardware, but for what they consider their writing strength: characterization. "I think the best science fiction is about people," Glen Morgan said. "I'm not saying that we're that original, but Jim and I know about people. It's weird when you sit down and come up with aliens and spaceships and you go, 'Uh, I don't know. Do this.' But other shows are a little bit more technology based."

The fast-paced story begins in the year 2107. After a fruitless search for signs of intelligent extraterrestrial life, the people of Earth have founded Vesta, the first off-world colony, in the Epsilon Eridani Star System. When Vesta is abruptly destroyed in a savage attack by a mysterious and hostile race of aliens, Earth finds itself plunged into out and out war. Caught up in the conflagration are three young Marine Corps Space Aviator pilot recruits: Nathan West, a would-be member of a second colonial expedition who has been separated—presumably forever—from his fiancée, Kylen, when he is pulled off the mission for political considerations; Cooper Hawkes, a "tank" who was conceived and born in an artificial gestation tank; and Shane Vasten, the daughter of two Marine Corps sergeants who were murdered before her eyes 15 years earlier during the "Artificial Intelligence" wars.

This central trio is surrounded by an archetypal cast of fellow raw recruits, crusty noncoms, by-the-book officers, ace pilots (among whom stands out the taciturn and tough McQueen), politically savvy bureaucrats and anxious family members. And there is yet another layer of conflict, internal to Earth: societal prejudice against the "tanks" is rampant, despite recent advances in civil rights legislation.

If much of this calls up memories of classic war movies, the resemblance is strictly intentional. "*Space* started with Peter Roth, the president of 20th Century-Fox Television," said James Wong. "He approached us and said, 'Let's do a space show.'" Since Morgan and Wong's writing experience was not in the science fiction genre, despite their time on *The X-Files*, they went back to their first love, the movies, for inspiration. Film majors in college, and admirers of the war genre, they have drawn upon some of their favorites, in particular *Twelve O'Clock High*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Howard Hawks' *Air Force*. "We've always felt that war, as kind of a cauldron that you're thrown into, would really give a chance for the characters to be in some situations that are unusual and extraordinary," Wong explained. Some non-war films also fueled their imagination, including *The Right Stuff* ("both book and film," said Morgan) and the western *Shane*, which Morgan admires as an examination of the nature of heroism. Stephen Crane's great novella of war, *The Red Badge of Courage*, is also an influence.

IS IT TIME FOR A NEW SPACE AGE?

The pilot script for *Space* survived several executive-suite shuffles. "We started with Lucie Salhany," Wong recalled. "She left. It went through Sandy Grushow, who also left. It went to the movie side, and then Gary Hoffman, who was head of that, left. Now it's with John Matoian [the new president of Fox Entertainment Group], who has quite a wonderful take on the show." During this process, *Space* grew from a one-hour to a two-hour pilot, as each executive asked for specific changes and additions. "We didn't want to do a lot of rewriting," said Morgan, "but John Matoian wanted it. So we looked at the script, and we said, 'You know what, that scene is from that regime, and is kind of stupid, and that one is from *that* regime,' and we started throwing them out. What we're left with is everything we want." In the end, they eliminated several stock training and action sequences in order to add more scenes of character development and motivation. Morgan credits Peter Roth for seeing the project through to completion. "It is really his drive that has pushed it and us through the process."

Once Fox gave the go-ahead, Australia came under consideration as a shooting location. The script calls for a number of exotic-looking locations, and the continent Down Under had the right variety of scenery, ranging from rain forest to desert, as well as adequate studio facilities at Village Roadshow. "It was dictated by money," Wong says. "Australia would give us the most for a buck, for the look and what we can put on the film. We went down last November to check it out. The studio was very good. There are five or six soundstages, and people are very cooperative. They seem hungry and that was one other thing we value, people's enthusiasm. It was important to us that the people we assemble for this show have as much at stake as we do."

Mid-winter was especially hectic for Morgan and Wong. Their last episode for *The X-Files* ("Die Hand Der Verletzt," about a Satanic cult) filmed in early December and the two were on hand to

Continued on p. 6

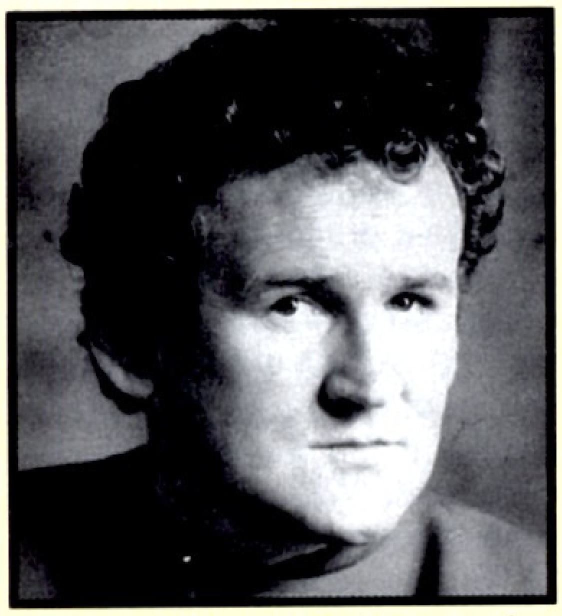
ScreenPolitic

By Paul R. Joseph
Professor of Law

Becoming Cardassia: The O.J. Simpson Trial As American Political Theater

The judge becomes a media celebrity and is interviewed on television. The defense lawyers squabble publicly. The defendant's book appears as the trial begins but perhaps too late to counter the effect of the one by the dead ex-wife's friend. The near-news tabloid shows, hungry for material, pick over the most minute details of the life and character of each participant.

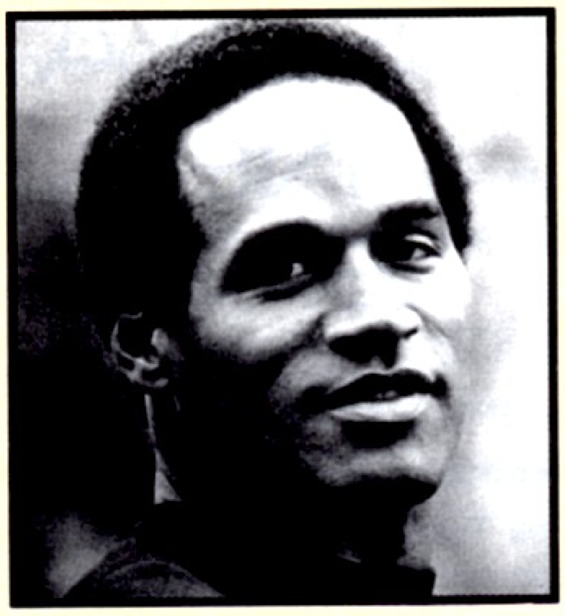
The O.J. Simpson trial is only the latest in a series of high-profile cases which have become larger than life, which have taken on the aspect of cultural theater. The Rodney King trials became stages for debating racism, repression, and fear of crime. The Bobbit trial pitted charges of male sexism and abuse against female rage and response. The Tonya Harding mess focused us on an alarming "win at any cost" mentality which sadly seems all too widespread.



Chief O'Brien

In each case, the narrow question of whether the defendant committed the crime seemed to become lost amidst the hoopla. This worries me. Legal systems are cultural tools for resolving disputes. They will, in some ways, mirror the culture out of which they grew. Thus, our legal system is very different from that in France or China or Cardassia. Or is it?

On one of the best of the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* episodes, Chief O'Brien is spirited away to Cardassia for trial. Cardassia appears to be some sort of bureaucratic dictatorship in which factions jockey for power while the populace in general is kept in line through a combination of repression and appeals to patriotism and racial or cultural superiority.



O.J. Simpson: Cardassian?

On Cardassia, we learn, trials are not for the purpose of determining guilt or innocence. That has already been done by the powers that be. Unless a defendant had already been convicted, he would not be on trial at all. No, the purpose of the trial is to give the accused the chance to publicly acknowledge his guilt and for the populace at large (watching via Cardassian television) to witness the superiority of the Cardassian system. That's what matters. The particular participants are almost irrelevant. Individual rights and the truth are trampled in the service of larger cultural goals.

In the United States trials are supposed to serve the narrower purpose of determining facts and applying law. While trials may contain elements of drama, they are generally duller in reality than on television. Jurors come to the case knowing little or nothing about it. What evidence they may hear is rigidly controlled so as not to divert them from the matter at hand. Community interest in the outcome is usually nonexistent—except that we all want justice to be done according to law.

Our recent high-profile trials don't bring us together, we are too culturally fragmented at present for that. Rather, they have tended to divide and polarize us, mirroring our ongoing culture wars. The point isn't which extraneous values these trials serve; it is that they serve any at all. Like the trials on Cardassia, there is a danger that the real purpose of a trial may be lost in the shouting and the news specials and the spin-off books. That would be a very dangerous thing.

Public discussion of public issues is important and appropriate. In fact, it's the national sport in a democracy. There's nothing wrong with it.

So why do I find myself thinking increasingly and uneasily of Cardassia?

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perform their usual production duties, even as casting for *Space* got underway (they plan to bring five to ten actors from the United States to Australia, where casting for smaller roles will take place). And they were in *The X-Files* editing room in mid- and late January, even as they worked on final rewrites for *Space*, continued casting and put together a production and design staff.

Morgan and Wong chose David Nutter, who has directed many *X-Files* episodes, including several they've written, to direct the *Space* pilot. Nutter's career has included much genre work, including episodes of *Superboy* and feature films. "Nutter's work on *The X-Files* is just wonderful," Wong said. "We seem to hit it off creatively."

Tim McHugh, who helped set up the Amblin Entertainment special effects department, and served as SFX director for the *Seaquest DSV* pilot, will take on the same responsibilities for the *Space* pilot. "Right now we're planning on using computerized effects," Wong said. "It all depends on how it's going to look. We'll see tests of the ships flying and so on, and determine then whether we need to build models or not." Bernard Hides, whose previous work includes Brian De Palma's *Casualties of War*, is production designer. Other preliminary designs came from Simon Merton, whose most recent work includes conceptual designs for *Stargate*. Director of photography is Australian David Eggby, who lensed *Dragon: The Bruce Lee Story*. Morgan and Wong also hope to bring in former astronaut Buzz Aldrin as a technical consultant for the pilot.

Not only are Morgan and Wong overseeing together every detail as executive producers of the pilot—Wong describes their partnership as "total collaboration"—but they are now planning further *Space* stories. Fox has already commissioned six more scripts in the anticipation that the show will indeed be picked up for a series.

Meanwhile, they admit they are taking a big risk by leaving the successful *X-Files* to take on such an expensive and complex project. "*The X-Files* is a wonderful show," Wong concluded. "We had a lot of fun and we've done some really good work that we can be proud of. Leaving was really hard, but it was tempered by the excitement we feel about this pilot. This is our first chance at a show of our own, and, the way it's going so far—with rewrites that we like, and production designs that are coming along really well—we're really excited about the future." *Space* is due to blast off from the Fox Network launching pad sometime next Fall. ✱

NOTHING TO FEAR

THE HORRORS OF PRIME-TIME TELEVISION

By Patricia L. Moir

It may seem overly pessimistic to predict a continuing dearth of horror series when, for the first time in many years, network-TV is offering a high-quality weekly thriller in prime time. From cult favorite to surprise hit to Golden Globe winner, *The X-Files* has built a strong viewer following, largely without promotion, in a remarkably short while. This popularity ensures that horror fans will be able to enjoy at least one series in the genre for some time yet. But, as welcome as this news may be, *The X-Files* is, in all likelihood, an exceptional phenomenon. Although book and box office revenues bear witness to the public's overwhelming willingness to be frightened, horror series have had a hard time making a place for themselves in prime time.

Not that they haven't been tried—there have been a number of short-lived attempts throughout the past forty years. Unfortunately, they just haven't been very good. Most prime-time horror series have been extremely disappointing, and even diehard fans have allowed them to sink into well-deserved oblivion with little protest. Plenty of successful series have dabbled in horror, borrowing from the conventions of the genre for isolated episodes, but their main premises are rooted elsewhere, and they are not committed to really scaring us. *The Twilight Zone,* perhaps the closest thing to a long-running series to date, was often eerie, but its true strength lay in its ability to inspire wonder, not dread. Science fiction, which has been adapted to the television medium with excellent results, encourages imaginative speculation in much the same way as horror, but has stayed solidly within the action/adventure genre overall. Both fantasy and SF, even the ever-optimistic *Star Trek,* have treated us to some genuinely creepy *moments*. But the occasional shock does not a horror series make.

The fact that other genres so often employ the trappings of traditional horror is evidence of its popularity among viewers. We have seen pseudo-horror in the form of soap operas *(Dark Shadows, Strange Paradise),* sit-coms *(The Munsters, The Addams Family),* and crime dramas *(Forever Knight).* Eliminate those series which are merely disguised as horror, however, and there remain only a very few shows which have actually attempted to frighten us, and even fewer which have succeeded. Even though horror is a rich and diverse genre, appealing to us on emotional, psychological, and visceral levels, it just doesn't seem to work very well in a television format. But why?

***The X-Files:* an exceptional phenomenon.**

Horror provides a peculiar and unique kind of entertainment; it is only good when it really upsets us. True horror speaks to us at the most basic, instinctive, common level of our humanity. In essence, it is about our need to survive, and our resistance to the fact that, ultimately, none of us do. Strip the plot from any horror story, and you will find the same grimly persistent theme: Death is the mystery which obsesses us all, and, whatever form it takes, it is always unpleasant to contemplate.

This thematic morbidity makes horror a considerable risk for broadcasters. Even with recent developments in video effects technology, a high-quality horror series requires a respectable financial investment, and failures are costly. While violent death has proved to be acceptable within a greater context of action, humor, or romance, horror tends to treat the reality of human mortality as a central dramatic concern. Viewer response to this is unpredictable. Horror fans enjoy being made uncomfortable; others do not. Even those adults who *enjoy* horror on film or home video may still worry about the universal accessibility of prime-time TV. Clear program classifications based on content and viewer age are non-existent, and, in any case, content warnings only work when a parent is present to monitor children's viewing. Even though public standards have relaxed considerably in recent years, it is probably safe to say that very intense or graphic horror will continue to be offered only to the more specialized audiences of late-night time slots and pay TV. Broadcasters are much safer committing their prime time budgets to other forms of imaginative drama—science fiction, mystery—which can provide thrills without broaching disturbing or taboo topics. And sponsors, understandably reluctant to see their products identified with anything potentially offensive, choose to support up-beat programs which will appeal to the greatest possible numbers of consumers. Consequentially, any horror series which somehow manages to find its way to prime time over financial and moral reservations is typically too inoffensive to be dramatically satisfying.

Of course, horror needn't depend on graphic depictions of death and suffering to be effective—some of the best horror movies of all time have relied on suspense alone to create an atmosphere of real terror. But that kind of horror must be built on a foundation of truly good writing, flawless timing, and strong character development,

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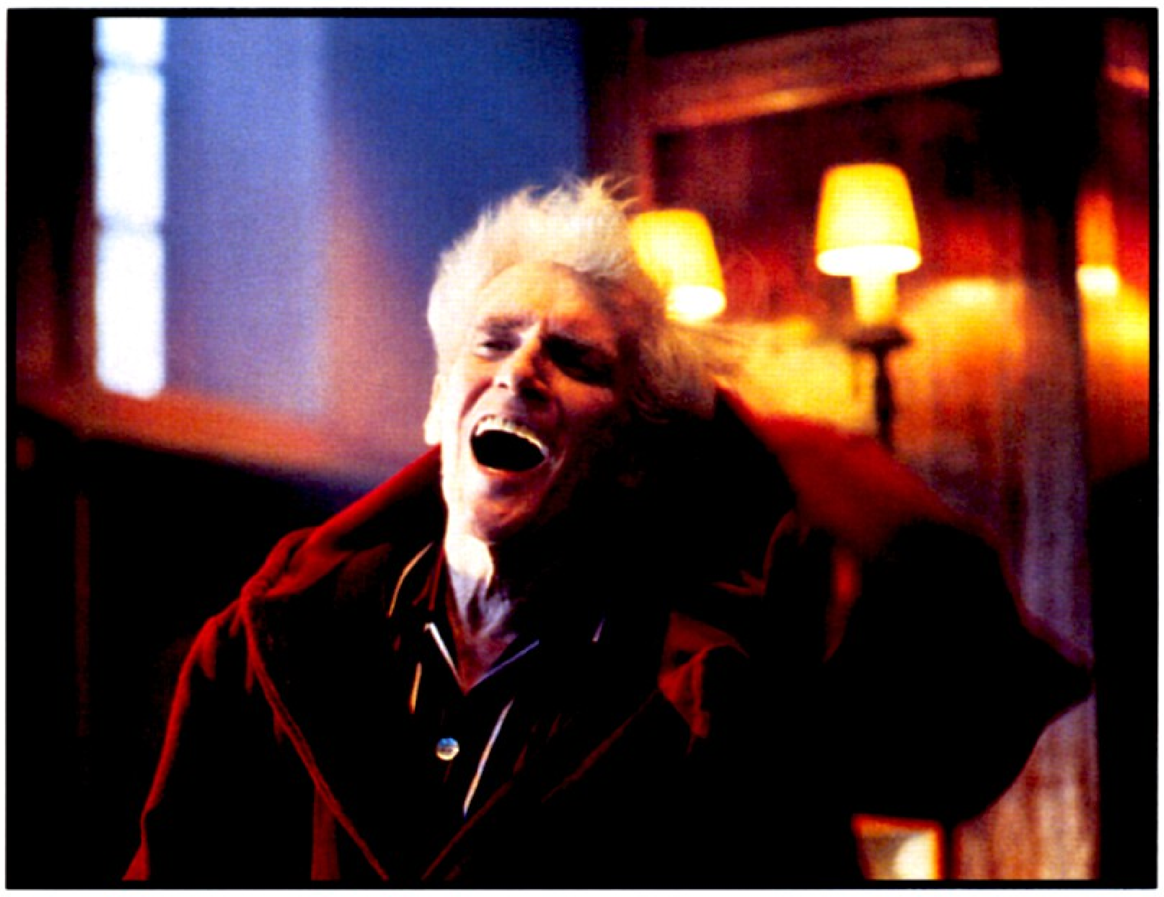
the outer limits

RETURNING TO THE OUTER LIMITS

By Kenneth Winikoff

> There is nothing wrong with your television set.
> Do not attempt to adjust the picture.
> We are controlling transmission....
> For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control
> all that you see and hear...
> You are about to participate in a great adventure.
> You are about to experience the awe and mystery
> which reaches from the inner mind to
> The Outer Limits.



The New *Limits*: William Hickey never wants to die in "White Light Fever."

The Outer Limits is a classic in the mold of *The Twilight Zone*, *One Step Beyond* and *Way Out*, a mirror of its own time, 1964, when the unknown wonders of science and the worlds other than our own held untold promise—and danger.

To launch the program's return to series television, Showtime's marketing department created an "out of this world" multimillion-dollar promotional campaign for the two-hour special "Sandkings," which kicks off the first year of 42 one-hour episodes. The campaign included free long-distance phone calls and a national sweepstakes with the grand prize of a four-night cruise to the Bahamas and lesser prizes such as *The Outer Limits* paraphernalia like jackets. Even non-cable viewers will get a chance to see the series in an unusual arrangement between Showtime and MGM, which will launch *The Outer Limits* in syndication this fall. This ensures that the revisited version will be seen in virtually all television markets in North America and a good many in Europe as well. There's apparently heavy interest in the show. Showtime originally ordered up 22 episodes of the series but later doubled its order to 44 hours, which is the first time the cable network has committed itself to such an increase before a series has even aired. In another unusual move, Showtime agreed to reduce its pay window (the exclusive right to air the series) from 15 months to nine months in order to allow MGM to launch the series in broadcast syndication.

But will the updated version of *The Outer Limits* translate well for the '90s? According to executive producer Pen Densham, it will. "The fact that we've been to the moon since then, in some ways, reinforces these stories." Densham, who also produced *Tank Girl*, with Lori Petty in the role popularized by the futuristic comic book, told Entertainment Weekly in December that his intention is to "take the groundswell of interest in old science fiction and those original *Outer Limits* episodes and continue on that journey."

The British-born producer says that where science fiction is involved, he's a fan's fan. "My own taste is more toward sci-fi than fantasy," he says. "In fantasy, you can cheat more." Densham grew up in England "eating" the local library's science-fiction collection. "One of my particular favorites was Charles Eric Maine, who did wonderful time-travel stories, and I was a tremendous fan of guys like Heinlein. I read *Puppet Masters* in '61 and the whole sense that there was more to the world than we knew and that there were doors to the future excited me." Densham had seen the original ABC-TV series when it aired in England and was likewise fascinated by *Dr. Who* and a British show called *The Quartermasters*. "It was all about a '50s period hero who was English and investigated strange scientific phenomena. But what was particularly special about *The Outer Limits* series was how it managed to attract some of the best performers of the time—people like William Shatner, Cliff Robertson—playing normal humans in abnormal situations. Densham and his partners Richard Lewis and John Watson, the founding partners in Trilogy Entertainment Group, were behind such big-budget features as *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and *Backdraft*, and television shows like the short-lived *Space Rangers*. Last year the production firm paid homage to Hitchcock's classic *Lifeboat* with an updated space-age version, *Lifepod*, starring Ron Silver, for the Fox Network.

When the partners met with UA studio chief Frank Mancuso to discuss reviving *The Outer Limits* for television, Densham recalls one of the debates was over whether to give the show an ongoing host like *Friday the 13th* or *Tales From the Crypt*. "I thought we'd actually be doing a disservice to it by doing that. You can get by with a *Roseanne* every week; in the TV world that's a very reasonable avoidance of risk. But there are very few anthology series that are significant today."

What makes *The Outer Limits* different from Densham's short-lived *Space Rangers*, and most other dramatic shows, he says, is that "Here I'm trying to create a philosophy." That philosophy is clearly spelled out in a 10-page "bible" written by Densham and handed to everyone on the production.

The original show, he notes "was a breakthrough anthology series fondly remembered for giving chills to a generation. Unlike *The Twilight Zone*, it wholeheartedly embraced science fiction stories, many of which were rip-roaring scary and always provocative.

"The new *Outer Limits*," he says, "will not merely be a rehash of 30-year-old scripts but will continue in the tradition of the original series and bring "new visions" to the screen. Although the co-creator of the original *Outer Limits*, Joseph de Stefano, reviews every plot outline and has creative input, the production values and plot lines reflect the three-decade gap. "We are looking backward ... we're going forward."

The updated version of *The Outer Limits*, Densham tells his staff, "needs to push to the horizon for creative ideas that stress the human response to situations...Greed. Fear. Jealousy. Altruism. Every episode should be a celebration of the incredible capabilities of the human imagination using stories and images that radiate emotions at high levels ... not just technology."

Therefore, Densham's bible calls for very specific requirements. For example, each episode should have an overview human purpose that guides the episode. "Each story should put that main figure through a change...the man who lost his courage should get it back. The greedy woman learns the error of her ways. The purpose of each story, no matter how great its fantasy premise, is to show us how human beings react. If the central character is unchanged by their experience in the show, we have failed." And while the stories can be "controversial, sexy, scary, astounding," they must also be "user-friendly." Therefore, there must be only one basic sci-fi premise per show. "No houses of cards."

The Outer Limits will be a show, he pledges, that is involving to the everyday viewer as well as the hard-core sci-fi fans. As a result, the characters should be relatable, "people like our neighbors. The fewer mad scientists and cleft-chinned heroes, the better. Even if they live on the moon, our characters should feel like they have 'real' lives. They should be trying to quit smoking or lose weight. They should be going broke. Forgetting their wedding anniversaries. Recovering from the loss of a loved one."

There will also be a variety of themes. "We should not be doing a story about an alien creature every week. Some of the other science fiction elements we can plumb are: devices or inventions, space travel or planet exploration, alien or altered biologies, alternate histories or future, parallel dimensions/realities, time travel or warping, advanced technologies (computers with Artificial Intelligence, robots, androids, cybernetics), mutant biologies, ESP or telepathy, stories playing on innerspace (micro-mechanics, specialized drugs, viruses, etc.), physical/scale changes, or stories involving cataclysms.

"Our characters will resist the fantastic. They will not just go 'Oh yes, that's a UFO.' Part of their denial and search for rational explanations to a phenomena becomes our audience's way of buying into the fantasy.

Things go bump in the night as a little girl and her dad search for monsters "Under the Bed."

"The taboos? Anything which does not have some sort of basis in scientific fact or at least have a supportable ingenuous basis that keeps it feeling real. 'She just suddenly sees ghosts' isn't okay. But if it's discovered that psychic mediums have a different DNA than normal people and sense things we can't, that is okay."

Also verboten are satires and sermons. "Hopefully our stories will be entertaining, told with a twinkle, and will honor our creativity, but we will never create a world that is a pure confection in order to moralize at the audience. Nor will we laugh at our audience. Whilst we are creating modern fables, we must invest in the reality of our characters and the moral should be deftly woven into the story. We will 'capture,' not 'lecture.' And the last taboo: stories that take place without humans and involving only creatures or beings that are unrelatable to humans.

As much as Pen Densham wants to honor the spirit of the original *Outer Limits*, we're not living in 1964 and he knows it. "To compete in a world suffused with MTV images we must have imaginative camera angles and lighting. Go hand-held, get involved. Take chances."

He notes that shows such as *Miami Vice* and *NYPD Blue* stood out from the visual clutter on the air because their creative teams had the courage to look different. The shots are framed with widescreen HDTV in mind. "I want atmosphere, smoke, netted lenses, etc., so that we feel and see the light."

Especially with regard to aliens, Densham points to breakthrough films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Alien* and even *Apocalypse Now* as examples. "We should try to help enhance their reality and character by under-lighting or diffusing their environment in some way...In some cases we might even light so that we see only shadows and silhouettes, saving the reveals to be measured out in tasty morsels."

The tease is a key element of the third *Outer Limits* episode, entitled "Under the Bed," in which Timothy Busfield stars as a psychologist determined to get to the bottom of the mystery surrounding a little girl's disappearance. The sole witness is the girl's sister —who claims that she was taken by the bogeyman. According to *The Outer Limits* special effects supervisor John Gajdecki, "we made an effort to ensure that you never see him [the creature] fully. He's skulking about."

The effects crew have a special mission—to keep the suspense levels high throughout the entire 60 minutes (or 120

Continued on p. 15

THE ORIGINAL LIMITS

by Steve Biodrowski

Such tricks hath strong imagination," quotes Tone Hobart (David McCallum) in "Forms of Things Unknown," the first season capper of the original version of The Outer Limits*.*

"I think it has lasted for the same reason Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—not the movie, the book—has lasted," says Stefano from his Beverly Hills home, from which he serves as a long-distance consultant to the new series. "The novel was a very clever and cunning combination of science fiction and the Gothic, and when I began to do *The Outer Limits*, I wasn't all that interested in science-fiction. I didn't know that much about it, and I really didn't like it. When I was seeing science-fiction as a kid, nobody ever called it that; it was just a 'scary' movie. So my tendency was to go toward that kind of thing. I was looking for the low-budget, shocking movie we could maybe do in seven days, and I kept infesting the show with a kind of Gothic atmosphere. Nothing would ever be set in an ordinary street if I could put it in a dark road somewhere."

The Outer Limits was originally conceived as something slightly different. Executive producer and series creator Leslie Stevens wrote and directed the pilot episode, "The Galaxy Being" before handing the day-to-day production chores over to Stefano. This episode, starring Cliff Roberts, bears notable similarities to *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, in that it features what appears to be an alien monster who actually turns out to be an enlightened being of greater wisdom than the frightened Earth people trying to destroy him.

"He had always liked not necessarily science fiction but all the things that go with science fiction, and never in our long relationship had we ever discussed it—the subject just never came up," says Stefano of Stevens. "But that neighborhood was familiar to him, so I wasn't surprised when he said he wanted to talk to me about a sci-fi show. About the same time Leslie approached me, I had been talking to Daniel Melnich, the head of ABC, about doing a romantic-thriller kind of thing, coming off *Psycho* [for which Stefano adapted the screenplay]. I had never produced, so I walked in and watched what was happening on the set when we made the pilot, and then I worked quite a bit in the cutting room. When we sold the pilot, ABC kind of expected me to deliver the scares, because I don't think the network knew much about science fiction. They liked the monster, and they said, 'Boy, you sure scared us with *Psycho*, and it's fun to get scared like that.'"

The one-hour anthology featured excellent, atmospheric lensing in B&W by Conrad Hall (Kenneth Peach would alternate episodes in the second season). "Black-and-white was an economical thing," explains the producer. "Nobody would have done an hour show in color those days. It would have been to expensive. But the "*Old Dark House"* thing was me, really; I liked that atmosphere.

"We didn't like a show that all took place on an army base in Alaska or the North Pole," Stefano continues, referring to "The Human Factor," one of the first season's weaker entries. "I was chomping at the bit to see how we could get those barracks to look scary. I used to drive around the MGM backlot, which was huge in those days, and look for spots that had a particular atmosphere. I picked one spot for a script I did called "The Invisibles," which was actually some kind of storage space; it was not really designed for movie-making, but it served my purpose—it was scary and isolated."

Leslie Stevens wrote and directed four episodes, including the pilot, of the first season, balancing out Stefano's Gothic fantasies with more scientific scenarios. He also contributed scientific concepts to other scripts for which he did not take credit. Stefano, meanwhile, continued with his own brand of writing, which used scientific explanations merely as macguffins to start the plot rolling. In fact, for "Forms of

The Man Who Was Never Born: Shirley Knight and Martin Landau

Things Unknown," the network asked him to write a second version of the script, with the science-fiction element removed, which could serve as the pilot of a new show to be titled "The Unknown." "I can't tell you how easy it was to do a version of that with no science-fiction in it, because I always dragged it in by the ear, and sometimes Leslie would supply a little bit more," Stefano admits. "His shows tended to be very much on the sci-fi beam but, I think, had some scary elements that might not have been there if he hadn't been working with me. He also knew that ABC didn't want a lot of guys in white jackets in labs week after week."

If the first season has a flaw, it is one which tended to afflict the second season just as badly: the need to include a "bear" every week—that is, an ugly monster to scare the audience. Episodes like "The Zanti Misfits," with its well-remembered alien ant-creatures, were right up the network's alley. On the other hand, episodes like "The Man Who Was Never Born" and "The Children of Spider County" relied on a repetitive plot device of giving benevolent aliens a hidden, "true" visage (i.e., the monster makeup), which they kept camouflaged through hypnosis so that we could see the actor's real face during interaction with the other characters. In "The Man Who Was Never Born," this makes some kind of sense, because the character is supposed to be the unfortunate denizen of a radioactive-contaminated post-apocalyptic world; in "Spider County," however, one could remove the makeup and not alter the plot.

If the show overcame this handicap, it was because the "bears" tended to serve unexpected functions. In a Stevens-style scenario, the ugly appearance belied the benevolent interior. In Stefano's hands, however, they tended to be Freudian symbols of pent-up sexual frustration, eros and thanatos united in an orgasmic death symbol. ("Don't Open Till Doomsday" is the classic example.) This imagery was often inserted into storylines that defied conventional dramatic logic (protagonists disappear for the third act; villains conveniently kill themselves in car accidents), forcing viewers to read them as dreamworks with their own underground logic, as if the real story is taking place beneath the one we're seeing on the surface.

"That may have been because I was in analysis at the time," Stefano explains. "I cannot really write a script without writing the one that goes before it. I have so much back story that is never going to hit the screen, but I can't bring a character in without knowing everything there is to know about him. I feel that most of the scripts are what they are because of this thing that happened back there. I think especially at that time in my life I felt all of the world was based on either the trauma or the wonderful experiences that we had had early on. We're acting out various versions of some sticking point in life, and people do it over and over, as if one day they'll get it right. The neurotic is the person who will go on believing that; the adjusted person knows you never will. Yet to get that scene right, I just need to know that information. As we talked about [*CFQ* 21:6:52], most of my script for *Psycho IV* was already in my head, because I had to know that when I did *Psycho*. Although I could never put it in the first script, I knew all those moments; I knew what would have impelled the Norman Bates character to remain fixated at that particular moment."

This eccentric and unique approach was missing from the second season, when Stevens and Stefano left after the network moved the show's timeslot to opposite *The Jackie Gleason Show*. "I was very annoyed with their changing the time," Stefano recollects. "I felt that, if we could have gone on the second season at 7:30 p.m. Monday night, we would have had five more years, and I would have stayed with it. But 9 o'clock Saturday night was never going to work."

The creature from Outer Limits' OBIT

The second year, featuring more conventional adaptations of published science-fiction stories, was canceled mid-season, but the total of 49 episodes remain alive in syndication. "Now three generations of young people come up to me and tell me they love THE OUTER LIMITS," Stefano relates. "I think it was one of the few shows done out of a real desire to do a show, rather than just to have a show on TV. We really wanted to do a knockout show that we could have fun with, so there was a lot of drive and a lot of creativity [from people like] Conrad Hall and [director] Gerd Oswald. It's the thing I'm most proud of, and to be sitting here in 1995 talking about a revival of it is very rewarding."

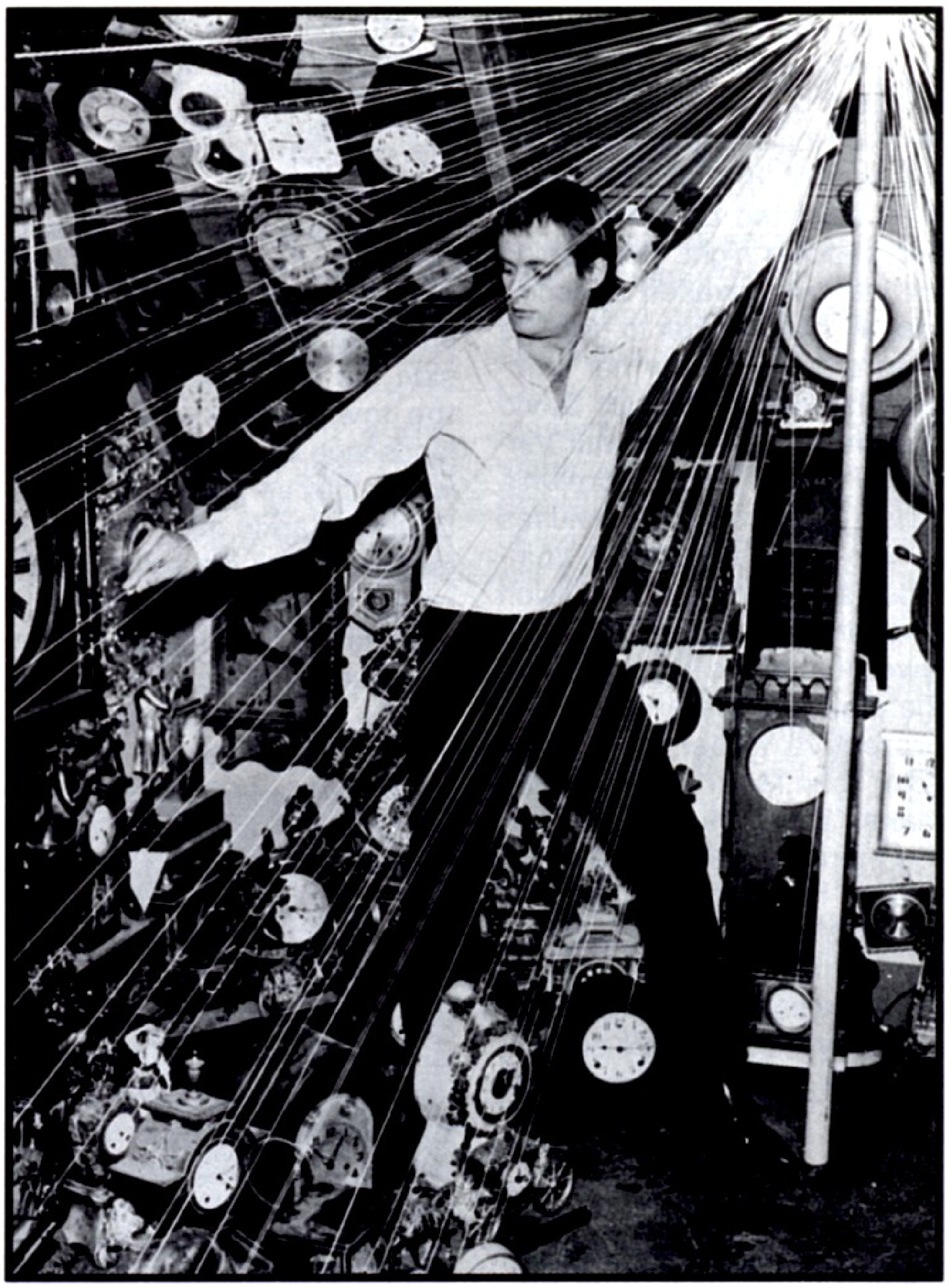
Stefano acts as a consultant on the new show, reading scripts and answering questions. "It's a way to be involved without being involved on a day-to-day basis," he relates. "I wouldn't mind doing another television show, but it would have to be one I haven't done before." As for Pen Desham and the new show, Stefano says, "They're really doing *The Outer Limits*, so I don't think anybody who turns the show on is going to think it's some other show altogether. The first episode that was shot, a two-parter, is a script that I would have okayed in a minute for the original. Most of the scripts are very much like the scripts that I did: they have the Gothic feel to them; the morality aspect of the show is there, all those elements. They're doing it the way I would be doing it if I had just suddenly decided to produce *The Outer Limits* again."

The phrase could almost be an epithet for the series, although the speech that follows neglects to mention the show's biggest trick: despite its science-fiction trappings, *The Outer Limits*, at least in its first season, was a dark, dense fever dream of weird imagery and Freudian symbolism, due in part to the fact that its producer, Joseph Stefano, was undergoing analysis at the time. The explanation for each week's strange goings-on was always laid at the doorstep of alien invasion or scientific experimentation, but seldom did these explanation hold up to rational examination; instead, the real story lay buried in a subterranean labyrinth of dementia and paranoia. Although many of the show's behind-the-scenes personnel would go on to work on *Star Trek*, *The Outer Limits* could be seen, perhaps more accurately, as the granddaddy of *Twin Peaks*. ✱

TEN BEST LIMITS

by Steve Biodrowski

One of the best genre show ever to grace the airwaves, The Outer Limits *has far more than ten great episodes, but the ones selected below give, I think, the best overview of "the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to the Outer Limits."*



Number One: Forms of Things Unknown

1.

THE FORMS OF THINGS UNKNOWN

The science-fiction element is minimal—in fact, dispensable—and Stefano's story cobbles together everything from Shakespeare, his *Psycho* screenplay, and *Diabolique*, creating a weird highlight. Two women (Barbara Rush and *Psycho*'s Vera Miles) murder an evil man (Scott Campbell), but Tone Hobart (David McCallum) brings him back to life with a time-tilting device. Every character seems trapped in his own little story, drifting off into hypnotic reveries and unable to connect with the others, but it all comes together under the brilliant direction of Gerd Oswald, one of two great directors who insured that the first-season episodes looked like mini-movies. Exaggerated camera angles, tableau compositions, and metaphoric match-cuts turn this into a rich, visual experience. Too "arty" for some, this is nevertheless a true cineaste's dream, an example of what the medium can do when used as more than a mere photographed stage play.

2.

DEMON WITH A GLASS HAND

Despite the second season's inconsistent quality under new producer Ben Brady, this Harlan Ellison script became one of the series' best episodes, thanks in large part to *Outer Limits'* other great, Byron Haskin (known to genre fans for his work on such George Pal productions as *War of the Worlds*). Essentially powerful and dramatic, the story is rendered in film noir terms by Haskin and second season d.p. Kenneth Peach. The opening, the only exterior scene, is filmed on a mostly bare set with a few patterns of light to suggest the setting—a nice expressionistic touch. Although the remainder is shot in an actual location, the Bradbury Building is baroque enough in texture to match this stylistic opening. Time traveler Trent (Robert Culp) evades Kaiban extraterrestrial invaders in order to find three segments of his computerized hand, which will then reveal the fate of Earth's future population. Along the way, he falls for Consuela Biros (Arlene Martel), who abandons him after the surprise ending: Trent is not a human with a surgically attached hand; he is a robot, with Earth's future population encoded as electrical information inside him. A devastatingly moving coda, and Culp's performance works even better on subsequent viewings, when the audience knows this secret. (Certainly, Ridley Scott had to be thinking of this when he set the conclusion of *Blade Runner* in the same building—yet more evidence to suggest that Harrison Ford's Deckard is in fact a replicant himself.) Easily good enough to have been a feature film.

Keeper of the Purple Twilight

3.

CONTROLLED EXPERIMENT

An anomaly in the *Outer Limits* universe, this episode written and directed by Leslie Stevens plays itself for laughs. Studying human emotional behavior, two logical Martians (Carroll O'Connor and Barry Morse) try to figure out why an Earth woman (*Star Trek*'s Grace Lee Whitney) killed her two-timing lover. Essentially a bottle show, the goal here was to expand a half hour of footage to one-hour length by repeating the shooting incident several times, courtesy of a Martian time device. The Martians never quite get it, but they become so charmed by the vices and eccentricities of this planet that they save the man's life. Delightfully amusing in spite of a repetitive negative image special effect that preceeds every time reversal.

4.

DON'T OPEN TILL DOOMSDAY

Another strange collaboration between Stefano and Oswald, this is the most overtly Freudian episode of the series, with an alien invasion plot that is merely lip-service for bizarre imagery of sexual frustration. Miriam Hopkins is sadly touching as Mrs. Kry, whose groom was abducted by an alien on her wedding night. Still hoping for the long-awaited consummation, she is eager to give the alien a substitute for her stubborn husband (stalwart David Frankham, also seen with Vincent Price in Roger Corman's *Tales of Terror*), who refuses to help the alien rejoin its comrades and complete its mission of destruction. An eloping newlywed couple is dragged into the plot until the bride's overprotective father (character actor John Hoyt) shows up and makes a devil's bargain with the monster just long enough to save his daughter, then sacrifices himself. The frustrated alien then "uncreates" himself—a fittingly climactic explosion, in which Mrs. Kry and her husband are, in a sense, at last united.

5.

NIGHTMARE

A strangely theatrical bottle show from director John Erdman, filmed on bare stages meant to represent the alien planet Ebon. The plot deals with human prisoners-of-war undergoing torture by the Ebonites; the paranoid twist is that the whole thing is orchestrated by Earth to test who will remain loyal during an interplanetary war. The minimalist sets focus attention on the knuckle-bitting tension of the characters, who believe one of them has spilled vital information to the enemy. Oriental James Shigeta (later seen in *Die Hard*) is believed guilty when actually true-blue American boy Martin Sheen is the squealer. In a twist typical of the series, it is the lead Ebonite (John Anderson, conveying tortured compassion from beneath the makeup)—not the Machiavellian human generals—who concludes that this experiment is immoral and decides to terminate it. For which attempt, he is promptly strangled by the uncomprehending human crew. Notable for being an early example of tv portraying the military in a less than glorified light.

6.

FEASIBILITY STUDY

A typical city block wakes up one day to find itself encased in a dome of fog; the shocking revelation is that outside the fog is not the rest of the town they knew but the landscape of an alien planet to which they've been teleported. Director Haskin milks Stefano's teleplay for all the spooky suspense he can, as the humans gradually discover they are intended as slave labor by the aliens, who suffer from an immobilizing disease. The title refers to the fact that this city block is merely a test of the plan's feasibility; if successful, the rest of Earth will suffer the same fate. In a moving finale, the captured humans intentionally contaminate themselves, convincing the aliens that their plot is not feasible and thus saving Earth. This noble act of martyrdom initially impressed the network censor as condoning mass suicide, but the network changed its mind upon viewing the final episode.

7.

THE BELLERO SHIELD

Director John Brahm does an atmospheric job with Stefano's "haircut" of *Macbeth*. As in "The Galaxy Being," a scientist (Martin Landau, who also appeared in the excellent episode "The Man Who Was Never Born") accidentally contacts an alien (John Hoyt). Bellero's wife (Sally Kellerman) kills the alien so that her husband can take credit for inventing the alien's force shield, an impenetrable defense which could make war obsolete. Unfortunately, without knowing how to turn the shield off, she locks herself inside, with a limited amount of air. The noble alien revives long enough to free her, but driven made by guilt, the woman still believes herself trapped. One of the series many good examples of contrasting greedy human behavior with that of more enlightened beings.

8.

THE INHERITORS

Another rare, good episode from the second season, this two-parter features Robert Duvall on the trail of a small group of humans whose brain waves have been altered, betraying an alien influence. This suspenseful story builds steadily as the "inheritors" of this alien intelligence kidnap handicapped children around the country and begin building a space ship. The twist ending is that their intentions are entirely benign, and the children, once inside the atmosphere of the ship, are cured of their infirmities. As was often the case in Year Two, the staging and camera work (by James Goldstone) is good but lacking the rococo richness of Oswald's best work; but, story editor Seeleg Lester's script is strong enough to sustain the two hours.

9.

THE DUPLICATE MAN

One of two good episodes Oswald managed during the second year. (The other was the Ellison-scripted "Soldier." Less metaphysical and profound than many installments of the show, this is basically a monster-chase, with a twist: the protagonist, Henderson James (Ron Randell) is too big a coward to track down the escaped deadly Megazoid he is responsible for bringing to Earth, so he commissions a clone of himself, which is left to do his dirty work. The intriguing Megazoid (an intelligent, thinking creature, which nevertheless kills for no reason) is pushed in the background by the drama of the clone discovering his true nature, becoming almost an idealized version of what the real James could have been. The monster suit isn't that convincing, but Oswald generates some genuine suspense when the two Jameses finally team up to face the threat, and his wife is left wondering who she would rather have survive—until a phone call from the cloning company informs her that James II is doomed one way or another, by a failsafe poison in his system. The understated finale implies that the real James has regained an important part of himself, though.

10.

IT CRAWLED OUT OF THE WOODWORK

Stefan and Oswald at it again. This episode is notable for the way in which the script actually dares to sideline its protagonist (Scott Campbell again) during the entire third act, while a police inspector (Ed Asner) abruptly takes over center stage. This rather bold dramatic experiment works mostly because of Oswald's stylings, which make the individual scenes compelling even while the dramatic arc is falling to pieces. This is set at the Norco research center, which has accidentally created some kind of being that devours energy. Mad scientist Bloch (Kent Smith, of Val Lewton's *Cat People*) wants to study and control it, even if he has to kill all his assistants to do it. (He revives them with nifty pacemakers; owing their second life to him, they become de-energized slaves.) The whole thing is some kind of strange metaphor for powers out of control that can't be destroyed but must be lived with, just as the lead character has a neurosis that he can't cure but must overcome. Nice effects for the "bear," and, as usual, Conrad Hall's atmospheric lighting turns this supposed research laboratory into a spooky old house of the darkest kind. This is an episode that really is more fascinating for its dramatic shortcomings, rather like watching someone with a disability overcome their handicap.

There are so many other fine episodes of the show, it's a shame to stop here.

These ten display the various directions the show took, defining what it was capable of, stretching the limits of the science-fiction trappings beyond the network-desired "bear of the week" format. Let's hope the new series can live up to this high standard. ✱

minutes, in the case of "Sandkings"). As a result, the viewer can expect to see quite a few red herrings, dead ends and most of all, just enough for him to want to stay tuned for the payoff, be it a closeup of the alien or monster that has harassed the hero throughout the story or the dazzling effect that was only hinted at for the hour.

Gadjecki joins an effects team that includes a small army of artists, prosthetics wizard Tibor Farkas and EFX producer Bill Orr, among others, all working on a tight production schedule to roll out the 44 episodes, an order that's enormous by any standard — nearly double that of the average TV series.

Production began last fall at the Bridge Studios in Vancouver with "The Choice," starring Megan Follows (*Anne of Green Gables*) in an episode that asks the question: Were the witches of Salem in fact genetic mutations?

"To create emotion on the screen, you have to be able to take risks," says Densham. "I worked with Marshall McLuhan when I was young and I learned quite a bit from him. Perhaps people underestimate the visual literacy of the viewer. Psychologically, everybody's thinking future. That's why we're shooting wide screen for high-definition."

Densham considers himself a "story man" and it's clearly his hand—and his bible—that guides the series. "Originally I sat down and created about 40 stories. I'm a story generator. I'm constantly trying to understand what moves people." Yet the prospect of writing 44 one-hour dramas is a daunting task, so he went about "finding stories that fit *The Outer Limits* and then finding people who can write them. I looked for people who were burning to write something. That's when you get your best inspiration."

With so many irons in the fire (Densham and his Trilogy Group have no fewer than 12 projects in development at the major studios and a comedy at CBS), the producer turned to Manny Coto, a veteran screenwriter and director (*Dr. Giggles, Tales From The Crypt*) who served as supervising producer on the MTV breakthrough dramatic series *Dead at 21*, to find the material. "It's an absolute blast," he said midway through filming the third episode in Vancouver. "It's like doing a major feature each week." So far there's been no dearth of treatments coming over the transom. The process, he says, "has been a mixture of taking pitches and contacting writers with a track record. I have a long list of science-fiction writers on my wall," he adds. "So far, the response has been very positive." The show has generated interest among established scribes such as William Gibson, another Vancouverite. "We had lunch and chewed around some ideas," Coto says. *The Outer Limits* has also drawn from a stable of veteran TV sci-fi writers like Emmy Award-winner Alan Brennert (*The Twilight Zone*) and even Coto himself. "My script's number eight," he beams enthusiastically.

New life comes from old in the *Limits*' "Second Soul."

The series kicks off with the special two-hour movie entitled "Sandkings." Adapted from George RR Martin's futuristic short story about a man who presides as lord and master over the alien civilizations he has captured, the tale is adapted to Pen Densham's specifications, where a normal man is placed in an abnormal situation and must either change or perish. Beau Bridges stars as the scientist who makes off with a tiny scorpion-like life form taken from another planet. As he becomes consumed by nurturing this new species and protecting his secret, he withdraws from his own world, including his family (dad Lloyd Bridges appears as the scientist's father and Beau's son, Dylan, makes his film debut). After looking at the dailies, Coto reported that the opener "looks absolutely smashing. It can be very scary in parts because it plays on the same fears as *Arachnophobia*."

Beau Bridges was also taken by the script, adapted for *The Outer Limits* by Melissa Snodgrass. "Initially this guy is very excited by the scientific potential of his finding. He sees it as being limitless. But he's frustrated that the bureaucracy doesn't see it on this level. He's not a mean-spirited crazy bastard. In the end, he makes the choice [to steal the aliens] in desperation."

Episode director Stuart Gillard (*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turles III*), a former actor who cut his teeth directing Canadian television, sees Bridges' character "as sort of an Old Testament kind of guy. In the end, he learns a lesson in humility."

Using a scale model of the alien Sandking, which more or less resembles a scorpion, and importing more than 250 real scorpions for some scenes, plus computer-generated images that give the effect of hundreds of tiny alien creatures running amok, Gillard managed to impart a sense of sheer terror. "The thing that's effective about CGI is that these creatures are frightening but not threatening. But when you have 500 of them, that's another matter."

The effects people made wide use of prosthetics for Bridges, including an arm that slowly decomposes after his character is stung by one of the alien creatures. Farkas went so far as to recreate infected tissue for examination by Bridges' scientist character under the microscope using real tissue samples. "We started off with a creeping kind of lesion. It kind of takes over his appearance eventually."

Farkas and art director Doug Byggdin were responsible for creating the latex model of the alien. "We went through a lot of stages of design," Farkas says. "We wanted something that was alien-looking and wound up with a six-legged beastie with a stinger." While the general inspiration came from the scorpion, the Sandking "has more of a head, eyes and teeth that a scorpion doesn't have." A special queen was also designed and deliberately made to look more menacing than her servant aliens. At least three rod puppets were created from foam latex, including two remote-controlled puppets for closeups. The devices, Farkas says, were designed more for realism than for shock. After "The Choice," in which CIA agents are on the hunt for mutations, a la *The X-Files*, the next episode to air is "Outbreak." The script, penned by Brad Wright, has Charles Martin Smith as a disease-control expert working in a lab where a virus that was being

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SHOWTIME SCI-FI

By Douglas Eby

The cable network is dedicated to a series of original science-fiction made-for-cable movies.

Wendy Schaal & Bill Campbell enter a cave in search of UFOs in Showtime's *Out There.*

According to producer Larry Estes, the made-for-cable movies which make up the science fiction series airing on Showtime have a unifying theme: "They're not like the science fiction you see currently, they're shot more '50's style, with the kind of themes a lot of people grew up with, where you have Everyman against The Aliens or The Giant Creature, that kind of stuff—movies like *The Thing*, those kind of post-war paranoia themes, but set in the '90s, or just ahead into the future. They will be about visitors from space, time travel, giant bugs and those kinds of things—not the freighter millions of miles away, and suspended animation, or virtual reality.

"When I was looking at science fiction scripts to consider for production, the thing that tied together the ones I liked seemed to be the similarity to movies I liked as a kid, and the series has emerged out of that."

The movies are being produced with what Estes says are very modest budgets, but he doesn't really see that as a restriction: "Like *The Twilight Zone*, we'd rather stick with the material and be more character-driven and situation-driven, rather than rely on effects. These days, people are used to mega-buck special effects, and I know I can't compete with that, so why bother."

The stories for the series came from a variety of sources. The second film, *Out There*, was from a spec script by husband and wife writers in Santa Barbara. The third in the series is a Robert Silverberg story. The fourth is a Kyoto Brothers (*Predator*) project called *The Giant Thing*, a sort of *Blob*-style film. The three brothers with a background in special effects and creature makeup, also did the TV series *Land of the Lost*. The fifth is a script commissioned from a treatment, a time-travel story, and the sixth is still kind of open—Estes says "it may be an interplanetary story, or I was hoping for a mad scientist."

One of the qualities that all or most of the projects seem to have is something the wide range of established performers appreciate, as Estes points out—"I like scripts that are 'actor heaven'—where they can find something fun to do, rather than just come out and read lines. None of these actors is making any real money on these films, they're just doing it for fun, because they really like the script."

One of the qualities many of films of all genres had in the '50s was a tendency to stereotype women and women's roles in real life. Estes notes that the Showtime series, while keeping much of the feel of the era, does update the way women are portrayed: "They are those kinds of movies, but set today, knowing what we know, having had the benefit of the women's movement, Woodstock, Watergate, all those things. We certainly don't consciously bend them toward the way women were treated then compared with now."

When asked what he hopes will come out of this series, Estes said "Another series of six", and laughs. "I don't make a lot of money producing movies, so the reason I really do it is that I like movies to turn out where someone says, 'I had a great time—that was really a lot of fun; I really enjoyed that movie.'

"This series is not up to date and cynical, like we like movies now, but it's still with that story line of who's a real human, who's not and how do you tell, and what are they going to do to us, and all the tacky stuff that goes with that."

It promises to be a lot of fun for the audience, as well as the filmmakers.

Dead Weekend

The enduring theme of an extraterrestrial invasion of Earth is given a new and unique incarnation in *Dead Weekend*, the first in a planned series of six films for a new Showtime series. Set in the near future, a military group is assigned to seek and destroy the central character of Amelia, an alien capable of radically switching her appearance and having other threatening attributes such as mind control, but also with a sexual voracity that makes her magnetically attractive to one of the soldiers sent after her, Weed (Stephen Baldwin). She is portrayed by five very different actresses.

Director Amos Poe (*Alphabet City*) emphasizes this is not another major FX project: "This is totally low-tech. It's not a *Stargate*, just the opposite. There is one morphing sequence that is up for grabs at this point; we're trying to figure if it's going to work or not. I've always kind of been against it, just because it sticks out like a sore thumb. It's not really necessary. If we don't use morphing, the transitions between the different Amelias will be accomplished editorially."

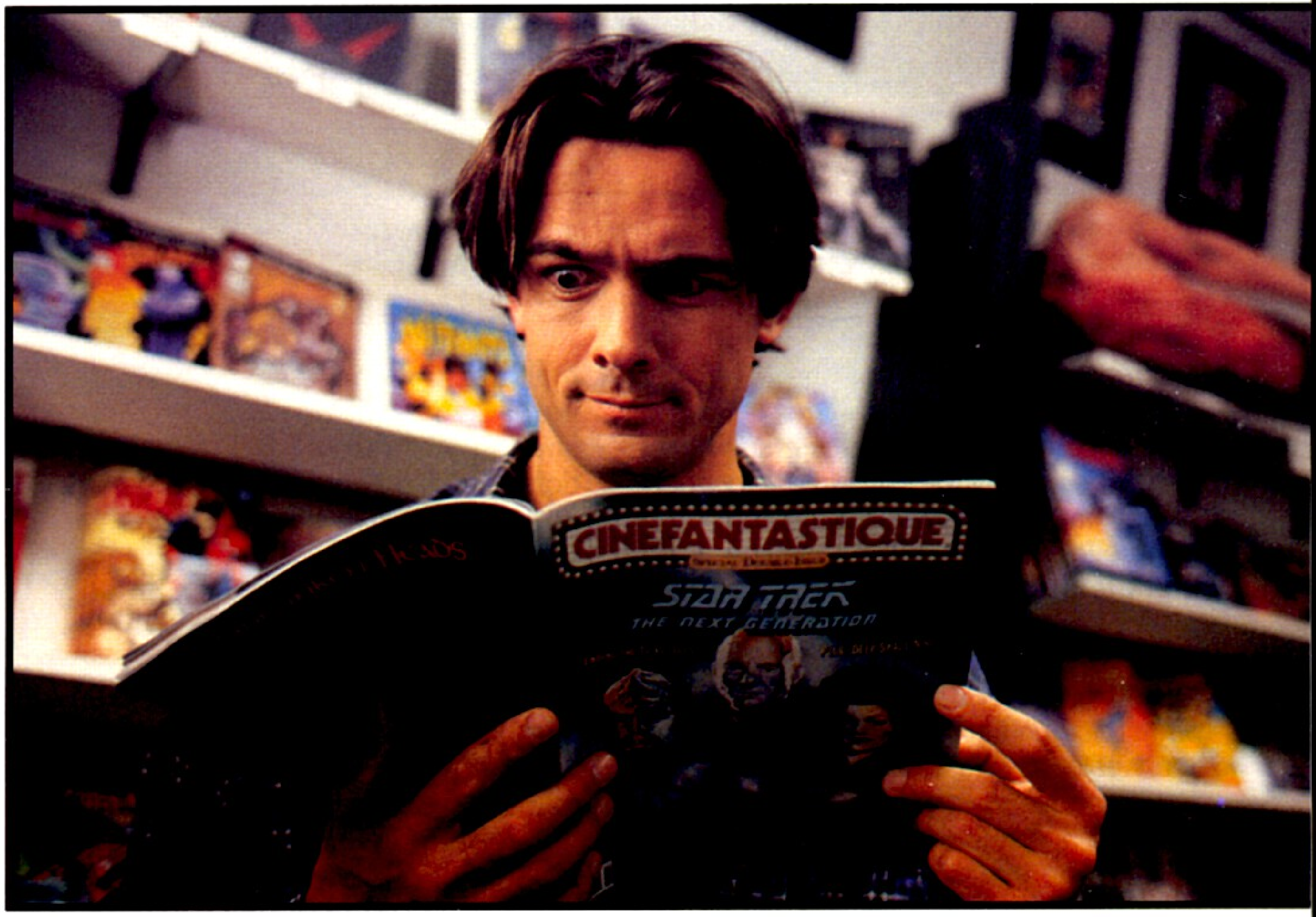
The story, created by Poe and developed further with his writing partner Joel Rose, involves a key medical condition. "We invented this disease called QSS—quadra synapse syndrome. Quadra synapse is the glue that holds DNA together. Amelia has this problem, and the treatment for it is pleasure. On her planet they don't eat or drink or sleep to get energy, they have sex. She normally needs to do it once a day, but here on Earth, because of the atmosphere, she needs to do it every couple of hours. The whole idea of this character Amelia is more Cubist, like Picasso. Usually in a film you have an actress playing a character different ways in different scenes, but this way, with five actresses and one character, you get a multi-perspective view of a woman." Poe is cutting the film and pleased with what he's seeing. "It's really working—you've never seen anything so nuts. It's a totally wacked-out movie, and funny as well." He notes that although the story is set in the future, it is "stylistically an *Alphaville* future rather than a *Star Wars* future. This is more of a theatrical film, because of the nature of it, and because Stephen Baldwin is becoming more of a movie star, and he's really put himself out on a limb, especially sexually. It's like Marlon Brando in *Last Tango* or something. In terms of rating I think it rides the line, but it's done beautifully, and more by implication, so we'll see. Showtime was looking for something erotic, so I hope they like it."

Estes confirms the films are going to "stick with the material and be more character-driven and situation-driven, rather than rely on effects. These days, people are used to mega-buck special effects, and I know I can't compete with that, so why bother." He enjoys the irony that one of the sets was the old Gilligan's Island lagoon. Blair Valk (Borovnisa Blervaque) portrays the "C" version of the alien. "I play the more romantic side of Amelia, more soft and sensual, more the seductress. The people from my planet are strong, like the strength of six men in one woman. We live for 600 years. There's only love and harmony on our planet, not war and fighting like on Earth. I'm on Earth for a vacation, just for fun."

But Amelia has qualities that make her so dangerous and threatening that she inspires a military response. "I can control people's thoughts and make them do what I say. We are so evolved we use telepathy a lot. That's good for me, but not so good for poor little Earth people. I see them as inferior creatures."

There are some scenes where one of the Amelias starts a conversation, then another one steps into the scene in the same position to finish. Switching between actors was, Blair says, "a little challenging, I must admit. Especially when you haven't met the other actresses and don't know their work. On my day off, I came on the set and watched a couple of the other actresses work. I realized if we all play the same character, we have to have some kind of connection to remember by words or body language. One actress, Barbara, had a little Southern accent, so I threw a little into my French accent. And I picked up the way they move, the way they sit, or anything—the way they twirl their hair. I picked up anything I could see to use."

Blair points out that although there is violence in the film, "in the end there's a wonderful message. Amelia explains to the humans they should look at themselves first, study each other, not go into space to kill before they find themselves. The message really is, 'People, make love, not war. Love each other before you start doing something you don't know about. It's wonderful to find out about the future, but you have to find out about your own self.'"



Writer Douglas Eby reads (what else?), during his *Out There* cameo.

Amelia "A" is played by one of China's foremost actresses, Bai-Ling (*The Joy Luck Club*). She sees her role as "the connection between all the Amelias, and she's more mysterious and very gentle, romantic, and the most alien in the way I look and act. My name Bai means white, and Ling means spirit or soul. When written, it is one of the most complicated Chinese characters, and very unique and special. Some people read my name and think of the three witches in *Macbeth*. I'm going to do a Broadway play with Terence Malick called *Sansho the Bailiff*. The character I play is a reincarnation of the god of mercy, and is always the beauty. In *The Crow* I played this bad, bad character. She's mean, and can read people's minds, and can control the crow. I think I play these kinds of characters because they have something to do with myself. I'm drawn to parts that have a spiritual dimension.

"The director, Amos, when he saw me, said I look really alien. All the others are girls you've seen somewhere, but with me it's like a totally different person. You feel there's some mystery about her you don't know, but she's very charming and loving and intelligent."

Jennifer MacDonald (*T-Force*) finds her part one of the more interesting she's played. "Amelia "D" is like this polyglot mutant from another planet. She is kind of the one who lives on the edge. If there is such a thing on her planet as violent tendencies, she has them—she's a little bit crazy and wild. She's happy spending time with this guy Weed, but she's really sick of the whole ordeal, and she's a little edgy. So many people have been chasing her around and it's been such a hassle.

She's sick of it, a little stressed out; it's like shell shock or something—the effects of war on the mind. She's not really violent, in fact she even says, 'You people are so violent. On my planet, it's maximum pleasure, minimum pain.' But she's very willing to use force if someone threatens her life.

"Over the course of the film, Amelia goes from one version to another and gets slightly more wild and insane and wacky. At the point where I turn into her, she's reached her peak before she goes into Bai-Ling's version."

Jennifer notes she has played a cyborg before, but "this is the first alien I've done. I picture her planet being like Thomas Moore's *Utopia*—before the end of the book where it's a total disaster-very advanced beyond Earthlings in their social skills, their ability to maintain a very peaceful society, with relatively little effort.

Safe sex? Above, alien Amelia D (Jennifer MacDonald) mates with Steve Baldwin and becomes, at right, Amelia E (Barbara Alyn Woods) in *Dead Weekend*.

Amelia comes to Earth, which at this point is a totally burned-out, disgusting place, for her vacation. It's funny, it's kind of an age-old thing, like those people who live in gorgeous mountain villages and want to come into Glasgow or whatever for the weekend. To extend the idea to coming from another planet to what most people would consider a horrific place, was interesting. It was really fun to do, and all the characters are very well written and well developed. When I first read it I thought it was really funny; I loved it. There's a lot of witty dialogue."

Another aspect of the film she appreciates is the production design, "one of the best I've ever seen. The color is very saturated and the frames are very layered, real fun to watch because there's so much detail. You never get bored. It's like the movie *Buckaroo Banzai*—there's all this weird shit happening in the frame, and half of it you don't even know what it is, but it's really funny. I like that—having lots of little unexplained details."

Barbara Alyn Woods (*Repossessed*) says she is "the more sentimental, emotional, sweet, compassionate Amelia. By the time he gets around to 'my' Amelia, Weed is actually starting to fall in love with her, in contrast to falling in lust with her. And she returns these feelings."

Barbara compares this part to one she developed in a well-known series: "I did play a human from another planet in an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, so in that sense I was a character coming from somewhere else. I came home one time in make-up and my friends didn't even recognize me. But it wasn't extensive, like enlarging our noses or giving us big pointy ears. I think the makeup helps immensely. All of a sudden you really don't feel like yourself, and it gives you the freedom to have fun and be someone else, be some sort of far-out character. It was a lot of fun."

Referring to her role as Amelia, and her parts in *Flesh and Bone* and *The Waterdance*, she notes, "I really did not play myself. I was a real character in all three. I really prefer playing someone other than myself. I just finished a couple of episodes of *Picket Fences*, and I played pretty close to myself. Because the production is so wonderful, I had a great time, but if I were to choose, I would really love playing something out there, in contrast to who I actually am.

"I got the opportunity to do this film because my first feature was *Circuitry Man*, a futuristic romantic adventure that was released by IRS, so I was familiar with the people who were not only casting, but producing."

She recalls hearing the producers and director talk about Amelia, saying what makes her different "is that she needs sex to survive, that sex nourishes her, in comparison to the humans, who have sex and get sort of brain dead, zapped of their energy. But I say that's the way it is in real life: men have sex and want to go to sleep; women have sex and they're rejuvenated."

Out There

The second in a series of Showtime's retro-styled sci-fi features, *Out There* is a comedy adventure described by producer Larry Estes as "more almost a detective story, an investigation, with a romantic comedy going on underneath."

The basic story involves former Pulitzer Prize-winner, now out-of-work freelancer, Delbert Mosley (Bill Campbell) buying a vintage Brownie camera and finding it has a 25-year-old roll of film with images of a UFO encounter, putting him on a search to uncover the story and authenticate the photos. The script, developed on spec by wife-and-husband writing team Alison Nigh and Thomas Strelich, was one that Estes found he "couldn't stop reading." He contrasts the material with other films, "This is not up-to-date and cynical."

The producer also recalls the enthusiasm of one of the notable stars during the casting, "We made June Lockhart an offer without even talking to her. When she came to work the first day I talked to her for about 45 minutes. She's this wonderful, bubbly, great person, and was delighted to talk about *Lost in Space* and *Lassie*. And she just loved the material in *Out There*."

Another enduring star who appreciates the project is Jill St. John. "I'm becoming much more a fan of science fiction and fantasy than I ever was before. I did *The Lost World*, but that was in 1960. This is a very fun script and there's a lot of very clever dialogue."

Her character, Bunny Wells, is described as a former movie star from the '50s who worked in grade 'Z' horror and science fiction. St. John notes, "She ended up selling real estate that sounds like a familiar scenario—and basically we find out she was processed to become an alien in 1969. They were making a space movie when it happened, and what [the other aliens] do is splice a few feet of their genetic makeup into yours, and then you become an alien. They do it by feeding you milk and graham crackers." She enjoys the humor in the characters. "We are advanced lifeforms—we don't kill people unless we want to eat them. We develop humans as consumers, properly, so they want everything."

She said, "It's an awfully cute show, and I don't think it's been done this way before. I think it's a new take. It's wittier than farce. The English would say 'taking the mickey out of it'—meaning you're making fun of yourself or kidding yourself, but with great fun, no malice."

St. John sees her character as, "a cross between Mamie Van Doren and Katherine Hepburn. And [real estate tycoon] Jon Douglas. Forgetting any science fiction points in it, I thought the script was really funny, and I love comedy. I know a lot of sci-fi movies that were funny, but weren't intended to be. This one is intended to be. That's what got me."

She noted one of the challenges of the fast-paced dialogue, "Sometimes writers are just typing away and forget that actors have to breathe, and I've had to do a few pauses or add a word here and there, where the rhythm was right, just so I had a spot to breathe, or gasp, as the case may be." Given the theme of alien invasion, St. John admitted she has never seen one but she's looked. "I live in Aspen, and we're near the Air Force Academy, and I'm outside every day.

I have seen a few strange sights, but it turned out to be the Stealth Bomber. I have a firm belief aliens are out there, though. I just don't know that what we've been told is right." But David Rasche (*Dead Weekend*) has seen a UFO. "I saw one when I was about 20. I looked up at the sky and saw a cigar-shaped object, with lights coming down, and it moved in a funny kind of way, and would hover, all that sort of thing. That was in northern Illinois. Months later I talked to a friend who'd seen the same thing, same night, in Michigan. There's no place to put that kind of experience, no slot for it." Rasche said, regardless of his sighting, "I have never been much exposed to information on aliens, but when I got this job I started doing some research, like on Roswell and Project Blue Book. I found one book in the library concerned only with sightings in the Hudson Valley from '83 to '89. There were hundreds of them. And I used to live there."

He credited Larry Estes for being "a very imaginative producer and he's hiring people to do things they don't normally do. I've played good guys and bad guys, but in this I get to play a weird guy, and that is really fun. Also [director] Sam encourages us to try things, to be inventive. It's not like he's a pushover, he knows what he wants, but he says go ahead, be inventive." Rasche also appreciated the writing and the script, "Sometimes we may add to the dialogue to make it more conversational, or quirky—like I had a line, 'What have you?' and I changed it to 'Whatever what have you?' because I figured my character would pile things up like that. But basically, writers take a lot of time and effort to write it one way, so it's usually more fun to see if you can't make it work the way they wrote it. Then everybody gets to feel like they're participating.

"The way they've written it is that nothing is what it appears to be, and that's really the fun of it. These people appear and seem to be one person and you think that's it, but then that person is no longer there—nor were they ever there. Then somebody else comes along with an explanation that makes sense, but you find out they're lying. You never know until the very end what's really going on and why." As his character, Poison, Rasche sees himself as the quintessential alien, the supreme capitalist. "I say things like, 'Any asshole can develop products, but it's developing consumers that takes superior intelligence.' Someone comments about the third world having all these products but no money to buy them. I say that what you have to do is help them progress and develop until they get to the point where you can, you know, screw 'em.

Weed (Steve Baldwin) enters the space ship of the sex-changed, shape-changing alien Amelia.

"I visit the Bill Campbell character in various disguises: once as the editor of *Omni* magazine, once as a sort of sleazy tabloid editor, and explain to him that everything is a product, everything has a price, that there's no good and evil, no bad, just cost effectiveness. We developed the nudie pen, Euro-Disney—that's all alien—the Ross Perot campaign. Those were failures of ours. Some of our successes were Rush Limbaugh and the Gap."

Sam Irvin credits Estes with giving him his first break to direct a feature, with *Guilty as Charged*. Irvin considers himself a devoted fan of science fiction and fantasy since childhood. "I have my whole collection of *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, and every issue of *Cinefantastique*. He majored in film "at the other USC—University of South Carolina" and recalls

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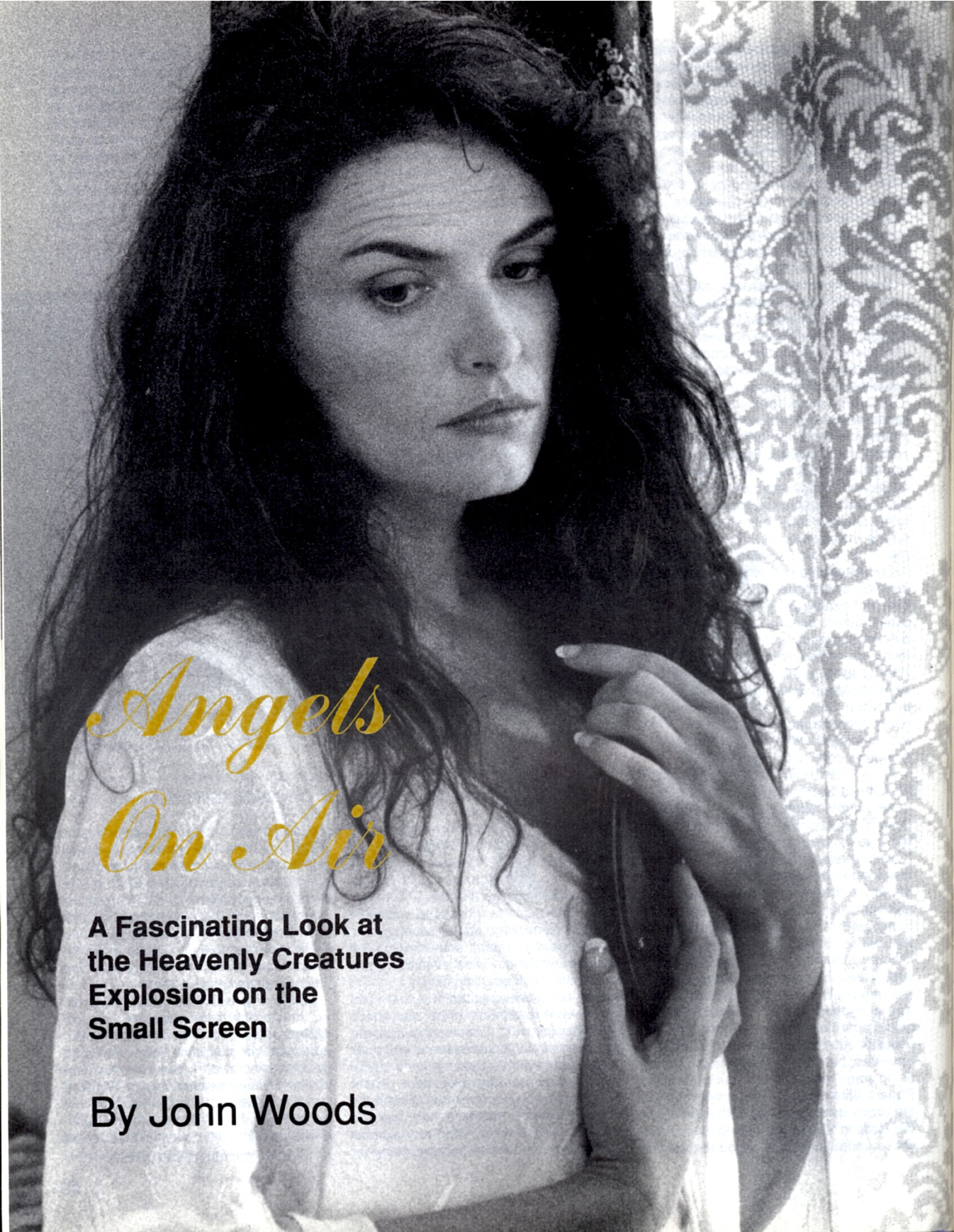

Angels On Air

A Fascinating Look at the Heavenly Creatures Explosion on the Small Screen

By John Woods

According to recent CBS and Time/CNN polls, angels are held in high regard by the nearly 70% of Americans who believe in their existence. Traditionally assigned to the role of heavenly messengers, angels are increasingly finding their way onto our television screens. This past season alone saw the arrival of NBC's *Angels II: Beyond the Light*, CBS's *Touched By An Angel*, the syndicated *Heaven Help Us*, The Family Channel's *Dad, The Angel & Me*, PBS's *In Search of Angels*, and the daily syndicated talk show on angels and other paranormal entities, *The Other Side*.

The television trend mirrors a nationwide phenomenon. Angels are everywhere these days, from movies (*Angels in the Outfield*) to books ("A Book of Angels") to the O.J. Simpson trial (the angels pins and earrings worn by Denise Brown). Their images grace cards, calendars and coffee mugs.

"There's a contemporary resurgence of interest in angels," said Janis Blackschleger, executive producer of *In Search of Angels*, a one-hour documentary created for PBS.

People are hungry for something spiritual

In Search of Angels—narrated by actress Debra Winger—was the No. 7 rated show on PBS when it first aired during a pledge drive last August. The show garnered an award as Best Documentary from the Special Interest Video Association and is scheduled to appear on PBS stations up to eight times over the next three-years.

Using David Connolly's book of the same name as a springboard for the research, the Pasadena-based Perennial Productions crafted a show that's both imaginative and comprehensive. (Connolly served as an associate producer.)

In Search of Angels finds angel treasures everywhere—in the Tiffany windows of St. Michael's Church in New York, the Bernini statues on the streets of Rome, as well as venues in Vienna, Paris, LA and Washington, D.C.

Director Ken Short said one of the best experiences he had during the shooting was wandering through Europe with his cameraman literally in search of angels. Sometimes they would appear in the strangest places such as "in corners between buildings built after the angels statues were constructed," he noted.

Besides beautiful pictures, the show also offered a nuts-and-bolts directory of the angel hierarchy as well as interviews with diverse personalities including Tony Award-winning playwright Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*), Holocaust survivor Leopold Page and recording artist Rickie Lee Jones.

Blackschleger believes angels to be a bridge between the world's religions. "We found evidence of each of these religions speaking on the subject of angels so consistently," she said.

Father James Gardener, SA, executive producer of the daily Mass on cable's Faith and Values Channel, says the popularity of angels on TV "is yet another indication of the public's hunger for spirituality and presents an enormous challenge to the church." Although television shows may trivialize spiritual subjects or treat them superficially. Father Gardiner believes "you have to take your chances" to got your message across.

Martha Williamson, the executive producer of the weekly CBS drama *Touched By An Angel*, says working on that series has strengthened her faith. Clearly taking its cue from Michael Landon's successful NBC program *Highway to Heaven*, the hour-long show features actresses Roma Downey and Della Reese as earthbound angels who intercede at critical junctures in the lives of others. Notable first-season guests have included Phylicia Rashad, Gregory Harrison, Randy Travis, and Kevin Dobson.

"To inspire people to self-examination of the soul and spirit is the highest goal of television," said Williamson, whose Moonwater Productions produces the show in association with Caroline Film Productions. Williamson, who worked as a producer on the show *Jack's Place* and was one of the original co-executive producers of the ABC drama *Under One Roof*, said she's "naturally drawn to family shows and shows that explore clear moral choices.

"We have tremendous responsibility as writers and producers," she said. "Nine times out of 10, like it or not, we're the people that set the standards for our children. People are sickened by the daily assault of hopelessness and violence of today's headlines. So shows like *Touched by an Angel* can make a difference."

She cites the many letters and phone calls the show receives from viewers. While some recount personal experiences with angels, others come from audience members such as a mother of two young children who is losing her sight. She wrote to say that after watching *Touched by an Angel*, "I finally found some peace and a good night's sleep," reported Williamson. "I realized something larger than myself is paying attention to my family." Despite never airing more than three weeks in a row and being switched from Wednesday to Saturday nights in the middle of its first season, Williamson said *Touched by an Angel* has built a loyal following. Even with renewal still up in the air at the time this interview was conducted, Williamson was optimistic about the show's future.

Not all shows with angelic aspirations get a heavenly reception, *Heaven Help Us*, a syndicated show from Aaron Spelling Productions, starring Ricardo Montalban as a head angel, disappeared without a trace. Back in 1979, *Out of the Blue*, the angel-themed spin-off of *Happy Days* didn't even last a season.

Of course, angels were popular with TV and film audiences long before the current craze. Who can forget the lovable Clarence, the angel who earned his wings in Frank Capra's classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*? Or how about Michael Landon's more contemporary role in *Highway to Heaven*?

Rex Hauck—co-president of American Artists Film Corp. in Atlanta, GA.—wrote, directed and produced two two-hour specials on angels for NBC in the past year. A third two-hour special on angels will air this fall. The first special, *Angels: The Mysterious Messengers*, aired in May and September of 1994. Actress Patty Duke hosted the program, which included segments on theories about the origins of angels and their influence an history plus a look at real people who say their lives have been affected by angels.

But in the current angel friendly environment, *Angels: The Mysterious Messengers* proved to be more than just a TV show. Time Life is selling the video, Ballantine has published the book,

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At left, *Touched By An Angel*'s Roma Downey

Feeling Odd

MTV's Oddities Continues the Network's Commitment to Fantasy Animation

By Cesar Cruz

MTV has long been recognized for the creativity and variety of its animation. Starting with its short, animated logo promos and continuing with the *Liquid TV* series, MTV has shown its commitment over the past decade to animation.

Now, *MTV's Oddities*, a new animation showcase from the TV network, has been launched with a fantastical taste intact.

Eric Fogel's *The Head*—the first animated miniseries presented under the *Oddities* banner—is a comedy-adventure about Jim, an ordinary trade school student, and the alien living in his head. Jim awakens one day to discover that his cranium has grown to mammoth proportions overnight because a courageous little alien is using it as a hideout to save Earth from an invasion of vile parasites. Jim and the alien make fast friends and allies, thinking on their feet as they leap from the frying pan into the fire and back again in a see-saw battle against all the obstacles and opponents that face them. (Butt-head, of MTV's *Beavis & Butt-head* fame, even shows up in one episode.)

The Head was followed by *The Maxx*, a series that originated as a comic book. *Maxx* creator, Sam Keith spent the last ten years in the comics, working on *The X-Men* and co-creating *The Sandman* comic at Marvel. He's best known for his working *Wolverine* covers for Marvel.

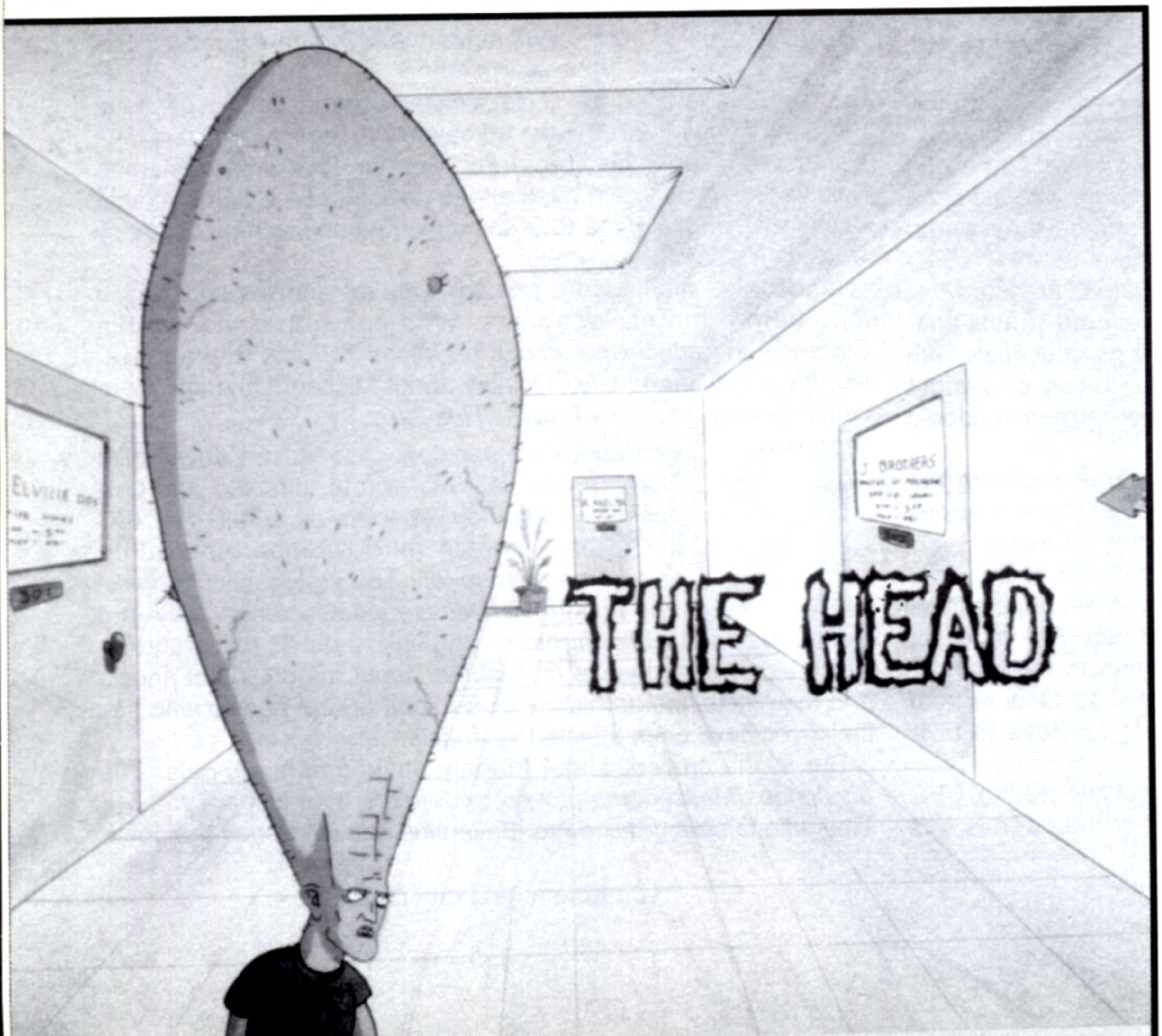
He joined Image Comics, a new company formed by a group defection from Marvel, when they invited Sam to create a comic book for them. What he gave them was *The Maxx*, a homeless superhero dedicated to fighting demons in two worlds, which may or may not be real. Within a year MTV sought him out for *MTV's Oddities*.

One of Keith's *Wolverine* covers was on display at a gallery in New York when it caught the eye of Abby Terkuhle, MTV's Senior VP, On-Air Creative & Animation. Terkuhle finds the artists and recruits them through storyboard contests MTV holds as well as scouting out festivals all over the world. In an early conversation between the two, Keith showed Terkuhle his new comic book. The bizarre *Maxx* fit perfectly into the idea for the upcoming *Oddities* showcase. After a year or so of negotiating *The Maxx* was commissioned as a computer animated production of 13 half-hour episodes for MTV.

Terkuhle, who formerly made commercial parodies for *Saturday Night Live*, has carefully fostered the animations at MTV. Of the variety and scope of the artists he says, "It's a mosh pit of creativity. In the beginning we invited all these animators to take our logo and throw paint at it."

For their part, the artists have seized the opportunity to be seen by MTV's vast audience. Their work does not disappoint. No two styles are alike, and no story they may tell, if they have one, is conventional.

As a series, *The Maxx* is riddled with ambiguities, unexplained twists and odd creatures whose dialog further confuses the audience. Homeless in the "real" world, The Maxx ventures into another world, a dangerous jungle where he battles demons and rescues jungle woman Julia. In the "real" world, freelance social worker Julia



An alien lives inside a head in MTV's *The Head.*

Winters bails the Maxx out of jail and takes care of him. She counsels him that he has just come up with this elaborate delusional system because he "can't really deal with the fact that he's powerless" in the real world. His response is that she's the one living in the dream world. The "real" world is the dangerous jungle, and *she* is the one who needs his help.

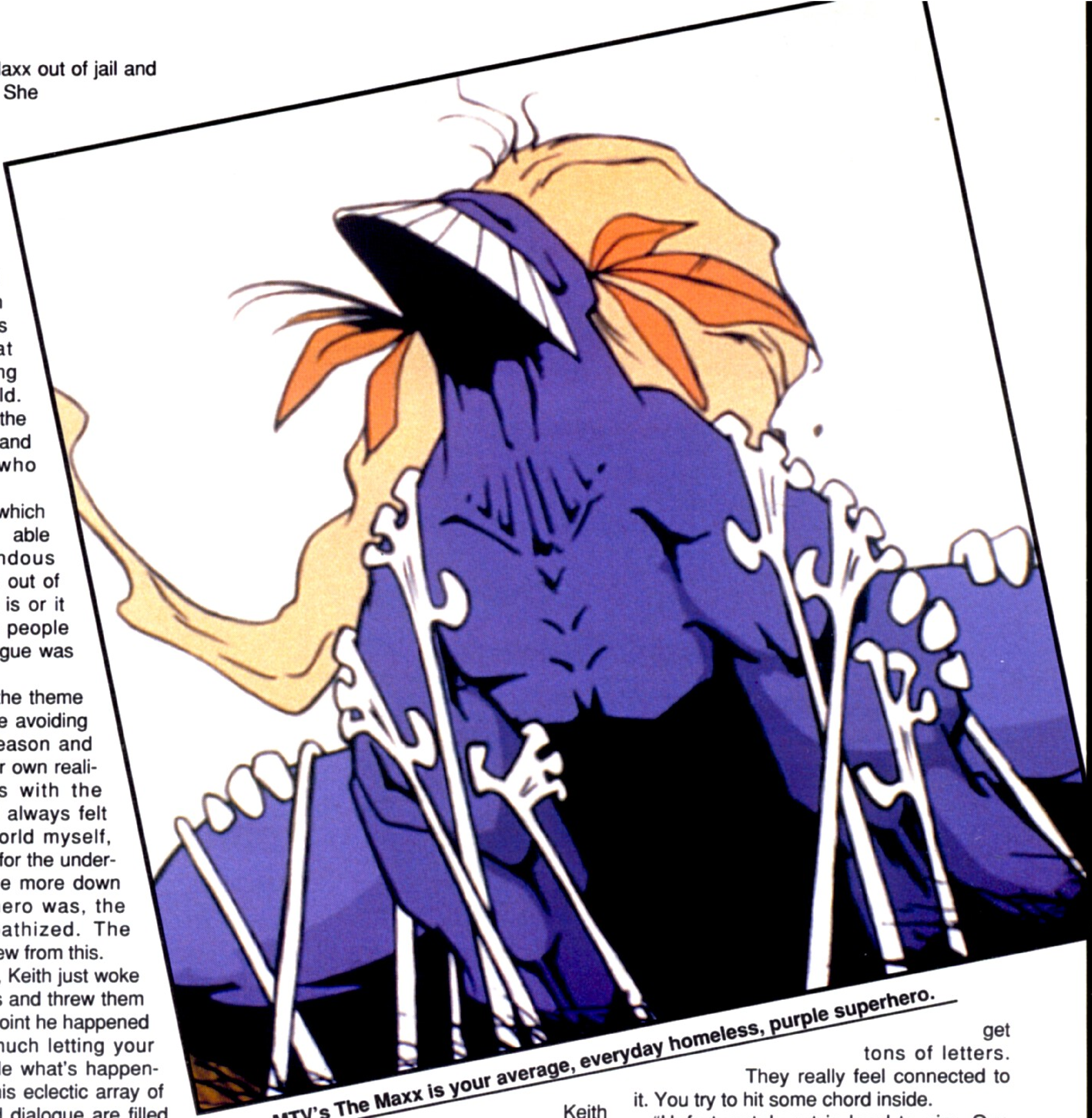
Keith won't say which is real. "I've been able to get a tremendous amount of mileage out of not describing if it is or it isn't... I just hope people realize that the tongue was firmly in cheek."

Keith describes the theme as "People who are avoiding reality for some reason and everybody has their own reality." He identifies with the homeless hero. "I always felt ignored by the world myself, and always rooted for the underdog," he said. The more down on his luck the hero was, the more Keith empathized. The Maxx's situation grew from this.

Some mornings, Keith just woke up with these ideas and threw them in the story at the point he happened to be. "It's very much letting your subconscious guide what's happening," said Keith. This eclectic array of images, action and dialogue are filled with curiosity and impact, but don't necessarily make for linear storytelling.

But that doesn't stop his fans from filling in the blanks themselves. "There's this huge cult following that we have," said Keith. "We get hundreds of letters from all these people every week who write 10 or 15 pages about what they think it means and all of them are closer than me. These Maxxheads send us dead crickets and Oreo cookies and strange symbols. My wife is sometimes a little worried."

Like everything else in the story, its villain, Mr. Gone, is unconventional as well. His attacks are psychological. He confronts not with danger, but with uncomfortable truths and secrets about his enemies. Like Hannibal Lechter, Mr. Gone knows too many hurtful things about the heroes and takes pleasure in giving them revelations.

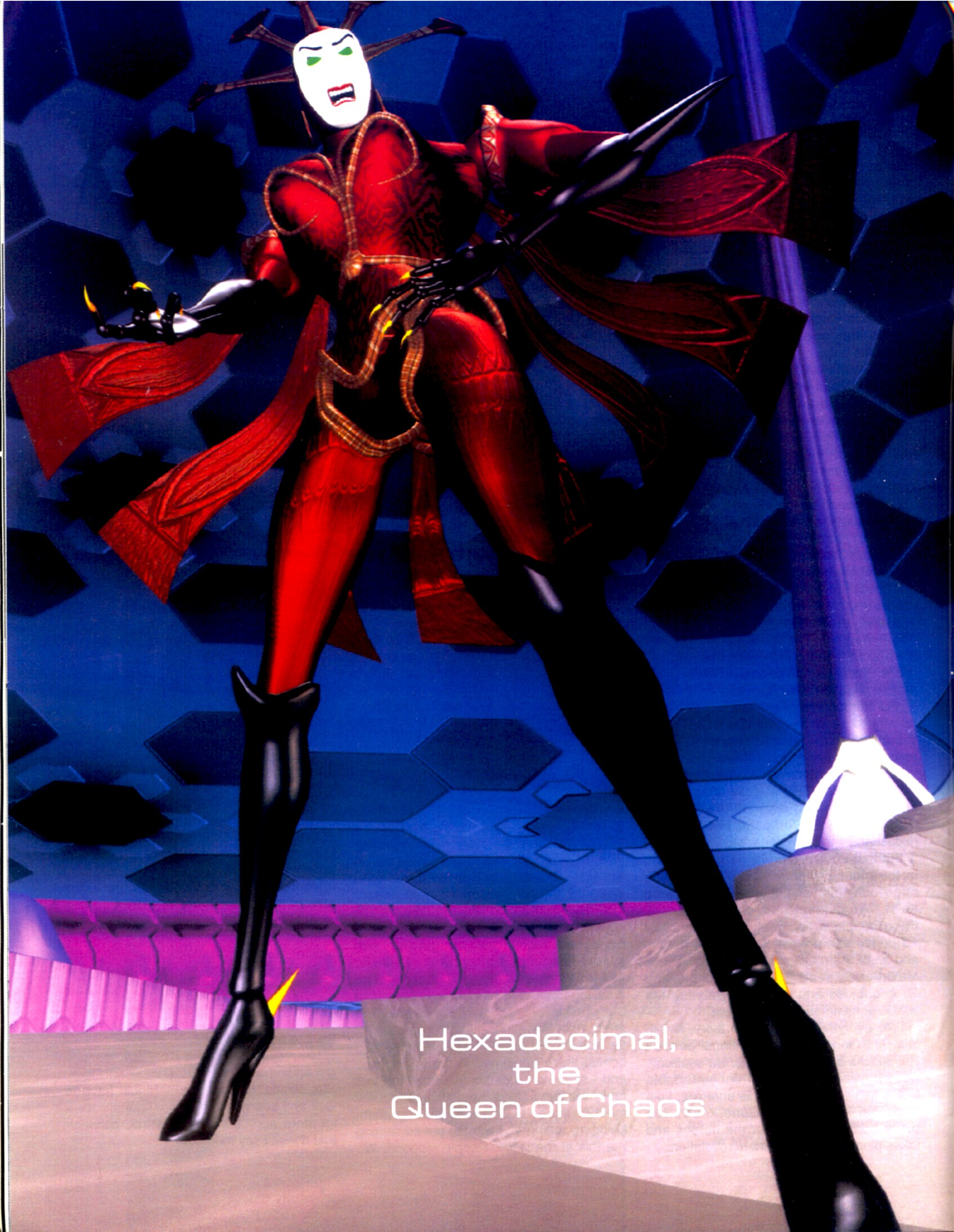

MTV's The Maxx is your average, everyday homeless, purple superhero.

Keith is never sure where the story will take him or how, or when it'll end. "I don't plan ahead like that. It wasn't until issue three that I thought I should probably have an end for this. By issue 20, I'd like to answer all the questions I've set up asking in the beginning. The reason I think I can get away with murder—as far as letting the story wander all over—is that the fans will go through an amazing amount of crap if they care about the characters. Even if the characters aren't well drawn, like ours, the empathy of the audience is high. If I can put something honest that's happened to me in an issue and I say, 'Let's talk about something that really matters in here, something about my mom or my dad,' or 'I was thinking about killing myself here.' I want to put something like this in the issue. People respond. We get tons of letters. They really feel connected to it. You try to hit some chord inside.

"Unfortunately art is hard to aim. One doesn't always hit the target. What I intend is never what they get out of it. I'm pretty hopelessly flawed at communicating what I intended. What I intended was, geez, the idea of, you know I probably didn't have a clear idea what I intended."

Keith, 32, is currently working on a live action short for MTV which he will direct. "You can't go five feet without running into someone who wants to direct. I just want to go and do it. If I find out I can't, I'll stop. I swear if I do something and it sucks, I don't want to repeat myself."

His new project is the story of a teenage girl finding a mysterious engine with legs. She climbs inside it and we'll just have to wait and see where this story goes. "It's a lot more normal than *The Maxx*, although that doesn't say much."✱



Hexadecimal,
the
Queen of Chaos

CyberScreen

Reboot Takes Saturday Morning TV Into Cyberspace

By Tim Hammell

I come from the the Net, through Systems, Peoples and Cities to this place. To Mainframe. My format: Guardian, to mend and defend. To defend my new-found friends, their hopes and dreams, to defend them from their enemies...They say the user lives outside the Net and inputs Games for pleasure. No one knows for sure, but I intend to find out... REBOOT!!

Spoken by Bob, Guardian data sprite, this prologue with stunning visuals and theme music opens *Reboot*, one of the brightest spots

Hexadecimal, the Queen of Chaos, is a kamikaze-like virus to be feared. She will disrupt functions at the risk of her own existence.

Dot Matrix is a smart and brassy inhabitant of Mainframe. Her sense of compassion has made her the city's leader and principal problem-solver.

on Saturday morning television in this country.

Originally shown, with little promotion on ABC Saturday mornings and YTV prime time in Canada, *Reboot*—the first wholly digital animated science fiction series—was pretty much a secret.

That changed when the series went worldwide at the beginning of this year. Rights have been negotiated and sold to 30 countries worldwide, including Japan. (This is quite a coup as Japan only allows 1% of its programming to be foreign.) Now, corporations are lining up to have the characters endorse all kinds of computer products. Toy manufacturers in the U.S. and Britain are gearing up. Video games are on the way and a fan club is available online. A 90-second *Reboot* promo played in 700 Canadian theaters over the Christmas season and *Reboot: The Movie* is currently in the scripting stage with contracts and funding in the wings.

What's all the noise about?

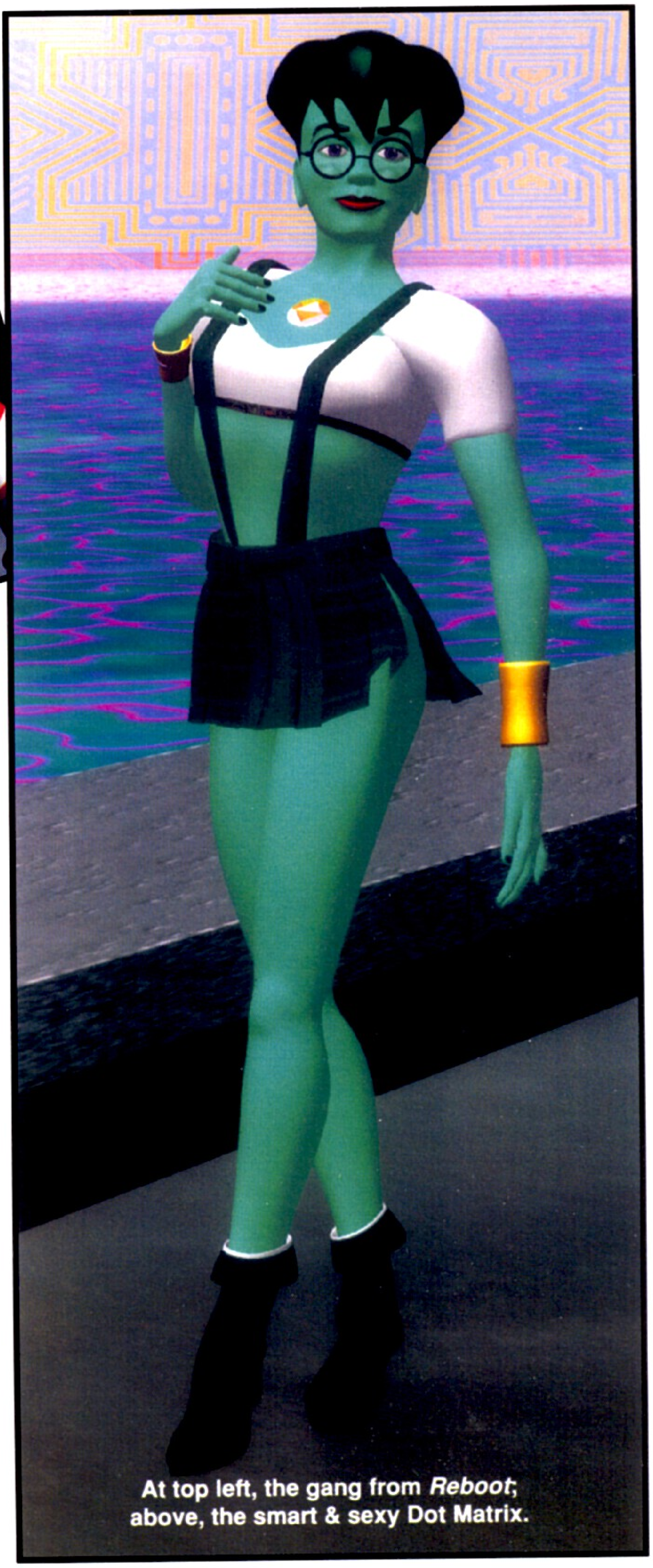
Reboot is self-reflexive Saturday morning television for a computer-literate generation. The action unfolds completely within a computer where danger can come from "the Games" inserted by an unknown "User" or from the anthropomorphic viruses which seek to take control of a city called Mainframe. The city is a massive presence which brings to mind Fritz Lang's silent science fiction masterpiece, *Metropolis* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*—though not as darkly depressing. A memory of Disney's *Tron* flashes to mind.

Creative Hub

Reboot was created ten years ago by a creative team known as the Hub: Ian Pearson (*Electric Dreams*), Gavin Blair and Phil Mitchell.

Pearson and Blair created the first CGI characters seen by most tv audiences for Dire Straits' *Money For Nothing* music video. Mitchell has made numerous award-winning commercials and these three men moved to Vancouver, Canada to bring *Reboot* to fruition.

The series is brought to life by a group of British and Canadian animators using Softimage software on SGI Silicon Graphics workstations, the same tools used for *Jurassic Park*'s dinosaurs. The software was customized by the animators to emulate natural facial expression and lip synchronization. They use no live action model footage or rotoscope methods in the realization of the characters.



At top left, the gang from *Reboot*; above, the smart & sexy Dot Matrix.

What makes this series more than a mere exercise in CGI animation are its witty scripts which emphasize the humanness of the digital characters.

Fleshed Out Digital Characters

Bob is a Guardian Program, a data sprite warrior, from the advanced civilization of the Super computer accidentally modemed into Mainframe, Bob moves a lot faster than anyone else and initiates the action with his hands-on, do-it-now attitude. While an anti-gravity surfboard is his main mode of transportation, he also rides a fish-finned, gravity-defying, rocket-powered red Cadillac.

Using his brain more than his brawn, he's a master of the Games and with Glitch—a multi-functional weapon attached to his forearm—Bob fights to protect Mainframe from any electronic threat. While Bob has become Mainframe's hero, he's an ordinary sprite, with human failings and a growing fondness for two of the city's residents, the charming Dot Matrix and her younger brother Enzo.

> *Reboot* is self-reflexive Saturday morning television for a computer-literate generation.

Dot is the owner of several businesses in Mainframe, her favorite being Dot's Diner. She is smart, brassy, gutsy and sexy. Her sense of compassion and community has made her Mainframe's leader and principle problem-solver.

Enzo (the most realistic animated kid personality since Bart Simpson) thinks Dot is the coolest person he knows. A bundle of misdirected energy, Enzo doesn't just tag along, he tackles Bob and hangs on, *hoping* to be dragged into an adventure. With his irrepressible enthusiasm and complete lack of concentration, caution or practicality, Enzo is constantly being saved from one terrible fate after another. Enzo's pal is Frisket, a mechanical dog, complete with supercharged engine under his nose hood.

Megabyte is the series' main villain, a charming, British-speaking virus who resembles a robot. Created by a mischievous hacker, Megabyte invaded Mainframe by stealth, attached to an innocent word processing program. His function is to grow and gain as much power and control as is virally possible. He constantly seeks to access the Super Computer by various nefarious means.

Megabyte oversees bad file servers, an army of mechanical ones and zeros, and is aided and abetted by the incompetent Hack and Slash. The duo is a heavily armed but dim-witted pair. Think Bowery Boys meet Laurel & Hardy. Although virtually unbeatable in a fight, they're easy to confuse long enough to escape.

Adding to the Megabyte problem is the evil villainess, Hexadecimal. Voluptuously dressed in a fabulous costume of metallic red, she wears a mask which changes with whatever emotion or mood she expresses. Her rage face is particularly unpleasant.

Queen of Chaos

Hexadecimal lives in the City of Lost Angles, a bizarre and warped floating sector of Mainframe. Also a virus, she's the queen of chaos and confusion. Not programmed to take over the computer like Megabyte, her love is not power but chaos. She's a kamikaze villain who will not hesitate to disrupt computer functions even if it means threatening her own existence. Her influence is strongest in Lost Angles and the lower levels of Mainframe, where she can exert some control over the masses of mindless Nulls.

Nulls are disgusting energy-eating slugs, unfortunate sprites transformed—or nullified—when their sectors went off-line. (This usually happens when the 'User' wins a Game.)

The background characters are a delightful range of creatures. Phong is the spiritual mentor of Mainframe and the oldest sprite in the city. The original command.com from way back in the IBM 360 days, he now serves as executive secretary to the new command.com.

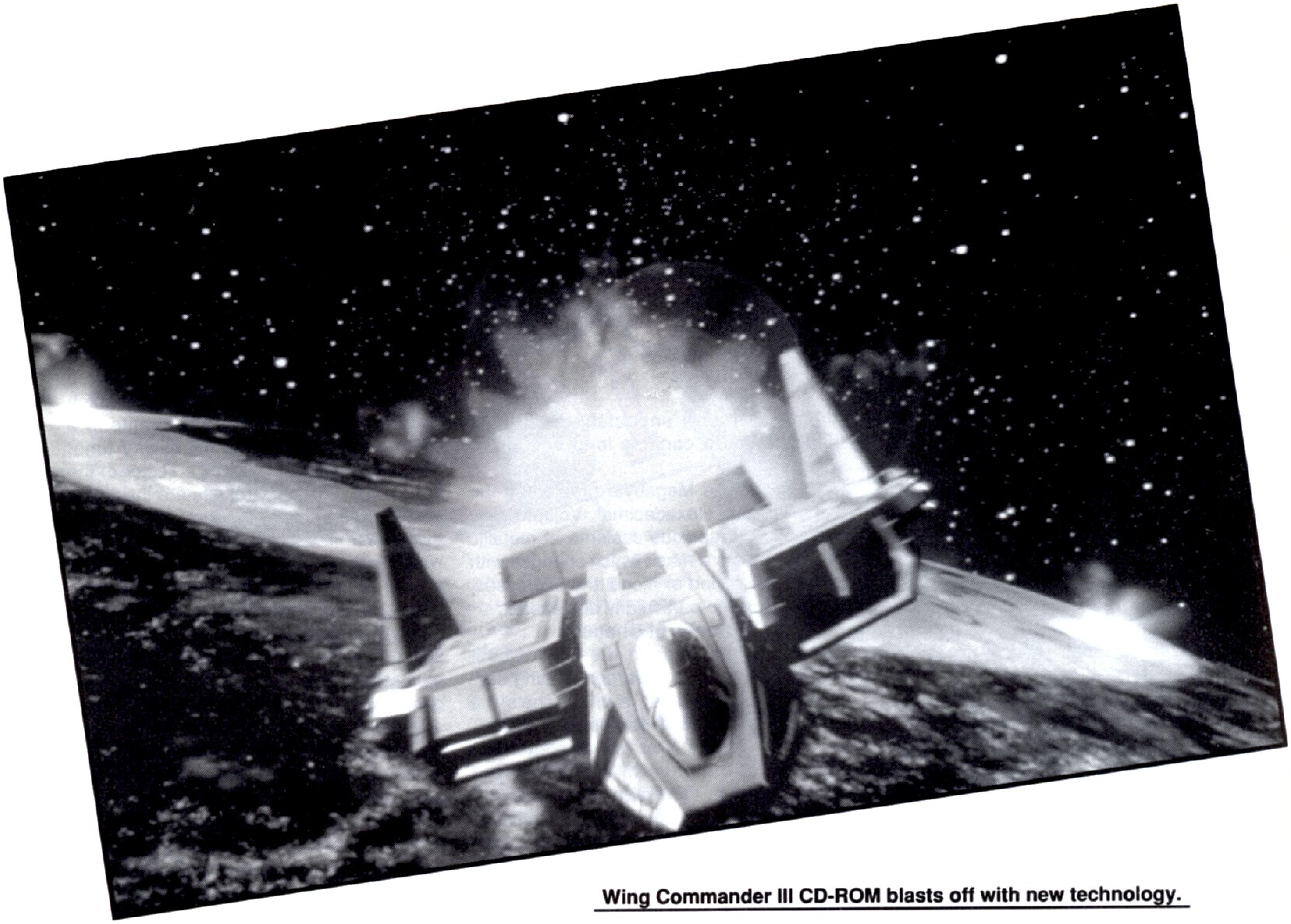
Scuzzy is Hexadecimal's pet spy, a somewhat feline-bodied projector dome with a single yellow wheel instead of legs. Megabyte has a pet Null named Nibbles, sort of an executive toy with an attitude. The citizens of Mainframe are Binomes, robotic-looking sprites shaped like zeros and ones, although sevens and eights also exist. They're the blue-collar workers doing word processing, graphics and number crunching. Dot's maitre'd, Ceci is a computer monitor with hands who speaks with a French accent.

The episodes' plots mainly hinge on Megabyte's attempts to access the Super Computer or otherwise gain control of Mainframe. The unknown 'User' inserts Games for pleasure, a magenta lightning patterned energy cube which descends from above Mainframe in a stormcloud and can strike at any time. Wherever it lands it engulfs a sector of the city. If any of the characters are inside the Game cube they can "reboot" to transform themselves into game characters and exist within the setting of the Game. Depending on the game, the sprites can find themselves in a pitched battle against aliens, demonic hedgehogs, knights and dragons, space fighters or little Italian guys with big mustaches. The characters must finish the game before they can continue with their adventure. Sometimes the two mix and they have to solve their problem/adventure within the game format. If the User wins, however, the entire sector goes off-line and any sprites or binomes trapped inside are turned into Nulls.

Not all of the stories are so earth-shattering. "In the Belly of the Beast" is a humorous adventure involving Enzo and his dog Frisket, who eats an "unformat" command that Megabyte wanted. Hack and Slash bungle the operation, resulting in a fun half hour of chases and escapes. This episode was the first to run afoul of censorship at ABC's Standards and Practices. "Unformat" commands, you see, give mechanical dogs bad gas. Throughout the adventure Frisket is passing gas, which, in the Canadian version, sounded as it should. ABC thought this was too rude and substituted backfire sounds for the American version. The end of the episode has Megabyte finding the command by stepping in it.✱

Third Time's A Charm: *Wing Commander III* Flies High

By Douglas Eby



Wing Commander III CD-ROM blasts off with new technology.

Game projects developed by director and producer Chris Roberts have almost always been best sellers, and his *Wing Commander* series helped usher in a new level of sophistication, opening the way to the current growth of interactive movies.

Set in the year 2654, *Wing Commander III: The Heart of the Tiger* continues the story and characters developed in the first two parts, but at a much higher level of player involvement than any of his previous simulator games, making use of almost two hours of full-motion, live action original footage of actors known for their work in feature films, performing against elaborate, virtual CGI sets and backgrounds, plus a full audio and sound effects track.

The player, as the heroic lead character, has control over ship and weapon selection, character dialogue and action pathways, and can play for 20 hours or more. Success of military missions against the tiger-like Kiliathi and control of a planet-smashing weapon, the Behemoth, depend on tactics and strategy, and also on the player's understanding of other characters and enlisting their help. Player choices affect crew composition and morale, and therefore the success of the missions.

One of the aspects of *Wing Commander III* that excited its producer Donna Burkons was the level of storytelling of the earlier games. "It has such a following, appealing to 15 to 40 year olds, which is pretty amazing," said Burkons. "A lot of adult men play the game because it's intelligent, not silly. It has a huge mythology behind it, a history behind every character." Burkons thinks her previous work with Disney Imagineering was "closer to this than my

An Interactive Kiss: *Wing Commander III* offers romance as well as action.

work on traditional features. This is more like telling a story through a theme park ride, except here it's taking a ride on your computer." She also sees the new game having wider appeal than most games: "As a woman, I want to play the game, not for the space missions, but for the story I know is in there. There's romance, comedy, pathos; everything you want. There are characters you want to kill, but you still like them in your bones. It's like life: there are a lot of choices available to you, and if you make the wrong ones, you end up paying. That's the best part. That's game playing, to me."

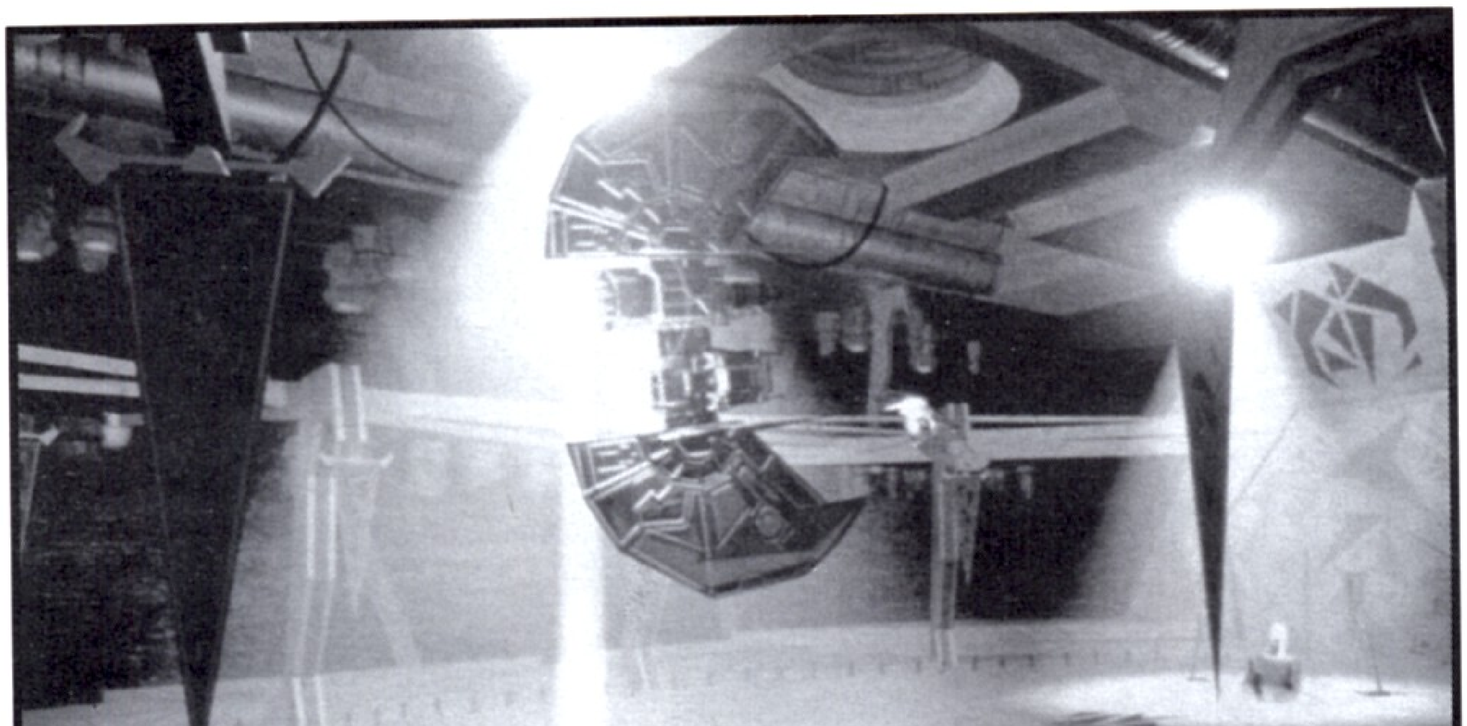
Burkons sought writers for the project that could "develop strong characters, and write character-specific dialogue, and that could 'get' this science fiction world." Screenwriters Terry Borst and Frank De Palma (*Midnight Run Around, Private War*) were able to turn around a script in six weeks. A standard film script is something like 50 pages long, while this interactive one is almost 300 pages wide. Borst notes that even though this is an interactive project, "You're dealing with a whole crew that has to break down that script and figure out how to make it happen. They have to understand it. It can't exactly look like program code, it's got to look like a script."

The player, as the heroic lead character, has control over ship and weapon selection, character dialogue and action pathways, and can play for 20 hours or more.

Frank comments on another challenge: "You have to let go of some of your own, maybe Fascist, tendencies that the story must go this way. You have to now explore other possible ways the story can go and write those possibilities. And not show preferences for one way or the other because the player has to have different avenues open. They have to film them all, too. But it's kind of liberating to actually explore all the choices and know they're legitimate and that they'll be played out by somebody." Given the multiple layer and parallel action complexity of this kind of project, there are now on the market interactive screenwriting software programs, but, as Borst notes, they found "as writers, you have to have an extremely good outline and structure. We used traditional, old fashioned 3 X 5 cards. That's hard to beat."

"Especially in this thing," said De Palma. "You need to see the structure. For a normal movie you'd need 45 or 50 cards. For this, we had over 200."

Bringing the story to life was an ensemble cast of experienced actors, though most of them new to the world of interactive. Jennifer MacDonald (*Terminal Force, Dream On*), said the production pace was very fast: "We'd shoot a minimum of five



Realistic effects, like this spaceship bay, set *Wing Commander III* apart from the rest.

Unlike its predecessors, *Wing Commander III* is as much a movie as it is a game, offering full character interaction.

or six scenes a day, and often 15. Sometimes the call sheet listed 72 shots. Working on a relatively empty stage with few if any props or sets demands focus.

The last *Wing Commander* took about 16 megabytes on a hard drive. *Wing Commander III* is on two CD ROMS, 1.2 gigabytes, so it's about 100 times as big.

You have to be completely concentrated on the other people you're working with." She noted that since the game player can choose different courses of action, "You want to make sure there are distinct differences between your choices. You can't be just a shade of gray, it has to be black and white. So in ways its a larger definition of character than in film."

Malcolm McDowell (*Star Trek: Generations*) agrees the shooting was "very chopped up, short little scenes, they can't move the camera." But working without practical sets didn't bother him. "I don't mind the set being green. I never worry about scenery anyway." He does take advantage somewhat of an onstage video monitor that shows the actors composited with CGI sets or backgrounds. "I just look in the eyes of the other actor. I take one look at the monitor—I see the other actor and myself, and the star background or whatever happening—I think, fine that's it, In we go—boom—that's where I am. The thing that matters is the human contact."

Former adult film star Ginger Lynn Allen (*Bound and Gagged-A Love Story, NYPD Blue*) found this a "new and exciting experience. What helped me stay focused was I really knew my character, how she would react to different people in different situations. Not having a real environment, just a green one, I felt completely out of my element at first, and what I did for that was go back to the beginning of my acting classes where we had to create an environment with basically nothing on stage. It was a little unbalancing, but I love a challenge."

MacDonald also agreed theatrical experience was helpful: "I think everything you've learned from live theater and film acting becomes extra important in an interactive film because you have to have enough focus to be there with nothing to do, besides your action with your fellow actor."

John Rhys-Davies (*Tales From the Crypt*; the *Indiana Jones* series) said, "This is not an opportunity for acting in the traditional sense you're only in small, key little scenes. What it does is give a series of challenges. They force you to concentrate on relationships in a very compact sense." Rhys-Davies thinks character will be developed much further: "I think ulti-

John Rhys-Davies: "*Wing Commander III* is the evolution of a new art form."

mately these things will give the full satisfaction that you can get in an extended piece of film or television. My sense is that historically character development has not been a priority in action films, and character is one of the ways this new form is starting to enrich itself. It's like the evolution of Greek tragedy out of the dances and, presumably, some sort of curious sacrificial rites and things like that—slowly, as you begin more and more to tell the story, more and more you want the details, the elements of the story like character."

Fresh from *Star Trek: Generations*, Malcolm McDowell appears in *Wing Commander III.*

Mark Hamill (the *Star Wars* trilogy) portrays Col. Christopher Blair, the alter ego role assumed by the game player. He finds the structure to have "no real dramatic arc of any kind; you're providing small pieces of a larger puzzle. There are so many variables there is no one scenario. That's the completely unique aspect of this. Normally, you look at a script and can understand the arc, even if as a character you don't know you're going to get run over by a truck. You want to build, and hit marks, and throw the audience off, or build up sympathy so when you do get hit by the truck it has an impact. In this, you can get hit by the truck, or dodge the truck, or a Corvette could come by; there's a certain ambiguity to everything you do." Hamill recalls a photo shoot, "with three gorgeous beauties from the film. I asked the actress I was playing a scene with if we had, like, *done it* in the movie, and her answer was 'Yes, no, and I don't know'- and she was right all three times."

Producer Chris Roberts is enthusiastic about this project, the first he has done for CD: "It allows us to use live action, and there's so much more detail and reality, allowing me to tell a much better story than before," said Roberts. "The last *Wing Commander* took about 16 megabytes on a hard drive, and this is on two CD ROMS, 1.2 gigabytes, so its about 100 times as big. Most of the games I've done have told a story, there's a beginning and end, it's not just scoring points. The interactive part of it is fun because it allows the player to come one level into the story. If you do it right, the player is the lead character." The presence of actors, especially those known from feature film and television work, Roberts feels, "will pull in a whole new market."

A recent trade paper noted that the total gross revenue for all interactive titles is over $6.4 billion—more than a billion dollars ahead of boxoffice revenues for theatrical features. Only a few years ago, the typical interactive game involved crude graphics, simplistic rules and teenage boys as the primary players. But all that is rapidly evolving as major technical and creative talent is being engaged by companies such as Electronic Arts and its game division Origin, developers of the new *Wing Commander III.*

Many of Hollywood's major players are avid fans of interactive entertainment, and are raising the production values of these newer generation of games. (Steven Spielberg is said to play Origin games even before they get released—often via modem with Robin Williams.) Further advancement in the size and range of audience will also follow new technical developments such as video game network services, allowing multiple players in different locations.

Producer and technical director for Electronic Arts, Mark Day sees this project as a next step for the company: "Not only have we upped the level of our interactive production, but we have a potential for a successful linear theatrical story here," said Day. "We have wonderful actors, good technology, a good story, a classic good and evil space opera." Day also notes one of the key advantages of shooting in video: "This entire production is one big effects shot; there are maybe 2% of scenes that involve straight shooting. With about 75% of the production completed, they're about 50% completed with editing, at least rough cut. The director on a daily basis can see what he shot yesterday, not just a daily, but a composite."

According to Origin graphic designer and art director Chris Douglas, who also developed the first two *Wing Commander* games, it takes about a week to design and program a CGI spacecraft in full detail, with moves taking longer. Chris and other designers and editors are busy all during the live action shooting, reprogramming the computer image data to change camera perspectives and other aspects of ships and backgrounds, based on what the director sees in daily composites. Douglas took inspiration for the style from a number of sources. "I watch lots of movies, read art books, comic books," he said. "One of our big things in this project was to give the art a much more cohesive look than we've had in the past."

"This is a very interesting project," said Rhys-Davies, "not only by virtue of itself, but it's a very strong portent of things to come. It's really watching the rapid evolution of a new art form."✱

40 Years of Disney Television

By
Dan Scapperotti

The genius of Walt Disney was not in the paint brush or styling pen, but in his ability to constantly look to the future. He bent technology to his will, adapting each new visual medium to improve and expand the influence of his small studio. Technicolor brightened his cartoons, stereophonic sound gave *Fantasia* a live-orchestral quality and the multi-plane camera provided Pinocchio's animation a depth never before seen. Today, decades after Disney's death, his studio continues to thrive across an ever-changing video and new media landscape.

Artistry and merchandising have always been the twin pillars of the Disney organization. And between Walt Disney and his brother Roy, they mastered both, creating some of the most stunning films to come out of Hollywood while jealously guarding the value of their creations for secondary markets. Eventually though, Disney plunged into television making his characters familiar faces in all corners of the globe.

In the Beginning...

By 1954, the Disney Studios had only released 23 feature films and Walt was about to embark on his most daring venture, a non-traditional theme park in the orange groves of California.

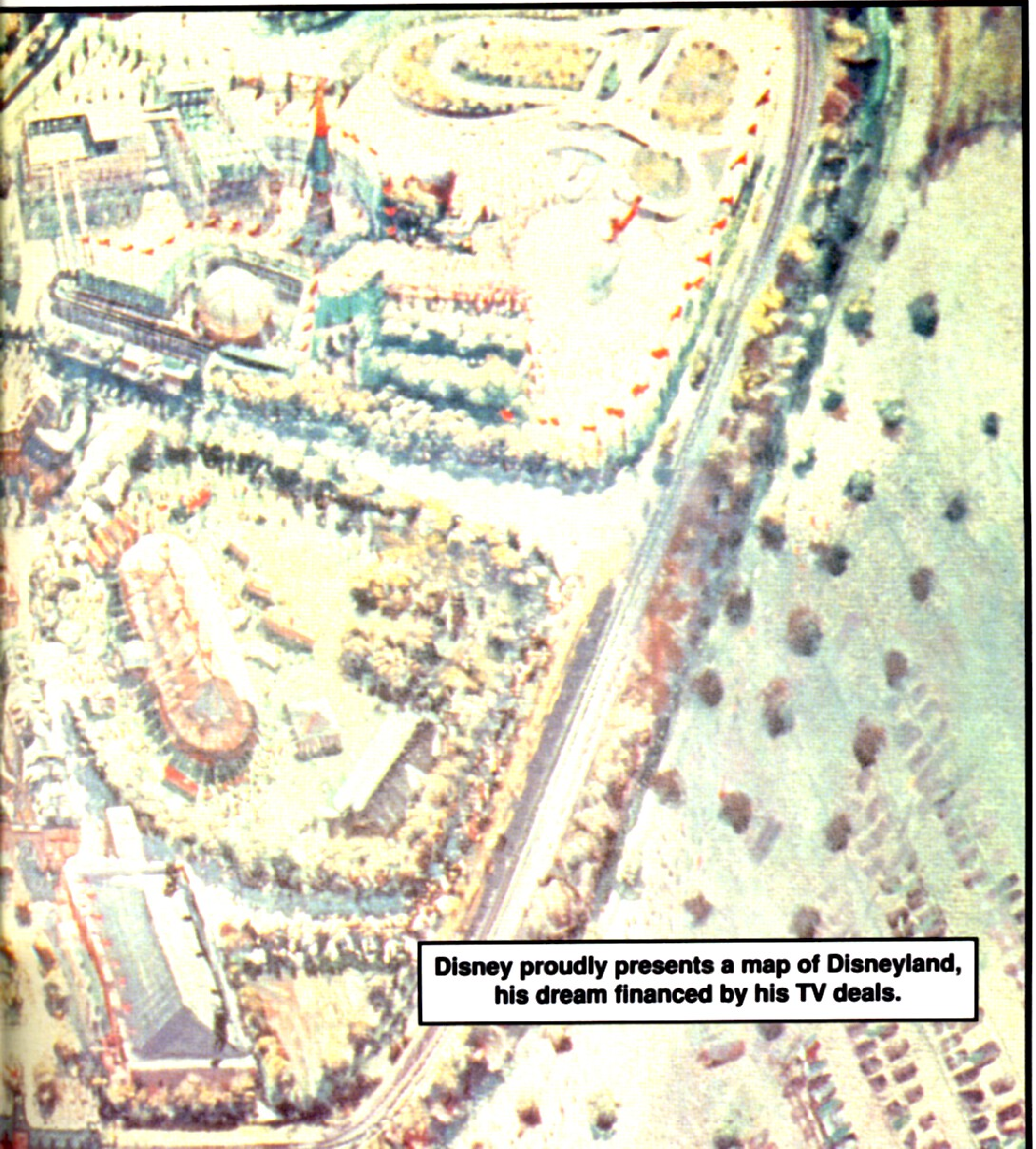
Walt Disney's entry into television is generally measured from the advent of the *Disneyland* program in October, 1954. However, according to Disney television historian, Bob Cotter, the master of animation was looking at the new medium as far back as 1944. Disney entered a joint venture with RCA, which owned the National Broadcasting Company (NBC). Anxious to sell television sets, the company was looking for a link with a major Hollywood studio.

The program was to be called *The World In Your Living Room.* It would tell everybody about the miracle of television, how it could educate and amuse. Cotter said, "They got to the point where they actually put together a rough cut of the thing when suddenly Walt realized that this was going to help RCA a hell of a lot but it wasn't going to do a lot of good for him. He pulled out of it real, real abruptly."

But Disney could not ignore the new medium altogether. The studio's first broadcasts were a pair of Christmas Day specials, one in 1950 on NBC and the other on CBS in 1951. The hour-long programs consisted of excerpts from his animated features, a format the studio would return to again and again. To kids who were used to seeing endless reruns of the primitive cartoons from the Van Buren Studios, including the antics of Farmer Grey, having Bambi, Mickey Mouse and Dumbo parade across the TV screen was an unprecedented treat.

Ed Sullivan's famous *Toast of the Town* program also became an outlet for Disney promotions. They did specials on *Alice in Wonderland* and Mickey Mouse's 25th anniversary. In February 1953, Sullivan himself was turned into an animated character meeting with Donald Duck who is jealous of the studio's newest star, Peter Pan. The program also gave a behind-the-scenes look at the animators at work.

At the time Disney began to embrace the new medium of television, the other Hollywood studios were vehemently opposed to consorting with the enemy which had snatched a large portion of their once vast audience. Disney went on record in 1948 saying that television could be the biggest selling tool for selling movies they've ever seen and he intended to get in line to use it.


Disney proudly presents a map of Disneyland, his dream financed by his TV deals.

The man who created Mickey Mouse was insightful enough to realize television was the wave of the future and he intended to use it to market both his forthcoming theme park and his theatrical feature films while finding a home for his vast catalogue of cartoons shorts which were fast loosing their place on the nation's theater screens.

Anxious to begin construction on his theme park dream, Disney struck a deal with the American Broadcasting Company (ABC). The fledgling network would put money up front for the park if Disney provided programming for the network.

The first *Disneyland* program aired in October, 1954, opening with a progress report on the construction of the theme park in Anaheim which was scheduled to open to the public the following July. There were no less than three progress reports during the coming months and Disneyland became the most famous amusement park in the world. Before it opened!

The second week saw an unprecedented movie. ABC broadcast a truncated version of Disney's *Alice in Wonderland.* Sure, Tweedledee and Tweedledum and some others Carroll characters vanished when *Alice in Wonderland* hit the small screen but here was a major Hollywood film on television a mere three years after its release!

The program which must have brought the most joy to the Disney marketing department was broadcast on December

Disney TV Gets Edgy With Shnookums & Meat

By Dan Persons

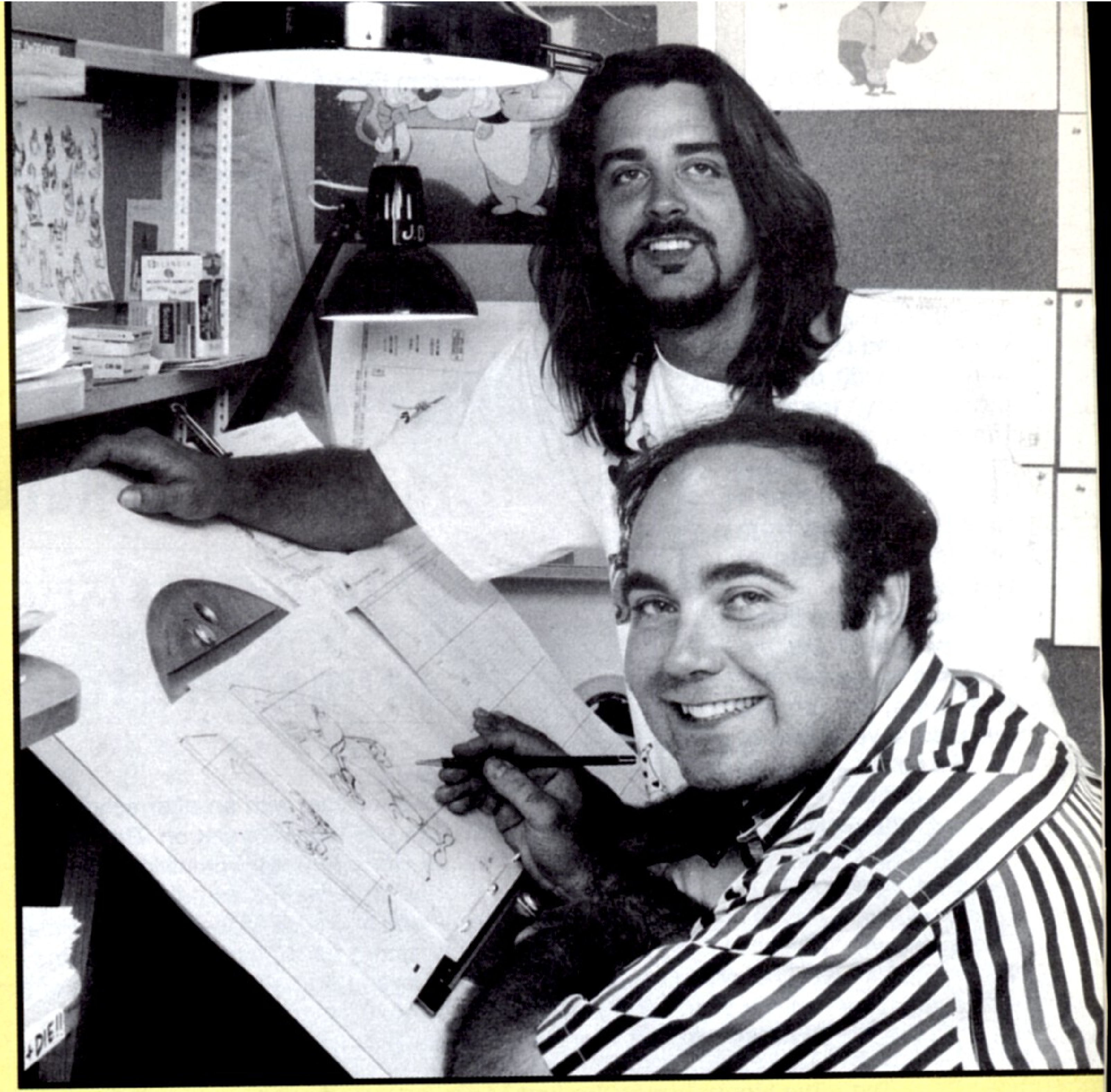
Disney has cut Bill Kopp and Jeff DeGrandis considerable slack in allowing them to wedge their rude, raucous, satirical *Shnookums and Meat Funny Cartoon Show* into the two hours of moral uplift that otherwise represent the Disney Afternoon cartoon block. There a point, however, when even the most open-minded of corporations has to draw the line.

"We went after *Animaniacs* in one episode," said producer/writer Kopp about a storyline proposed for the show's cat and dog duo. "We had a script called 'The Wacky-Kookiacs!' It was a total slam on *Animaniacs*, which we really don't like too much because we feel they're winking at the camera too much, and it's not truly funny. My theory is that there's nothing worse than a cartoon that has to keep telling you it's funny. So I wrote a script in which [smart-mouthed cat Shnookums and lunkheaded dog Meat] win a trip to go see what are basically the redesigned *Animaniacs*. It was really vicious and mean and they were just horrible characters: they were mean to everybody backstage and they were just completely sleazy. Disney didn't think it was a good idea. It was fun as hell to write, though."

There's an irony here, of course: without the Fox network's outrageously popular, Steven Spielberg-produced *Animaniacs*, the Disney-ites might never have realized that their own shows were in desperate need of a shot of pure, unadulterated looniness. Kopp acknowledged the debt, but also pointed out that it all didn't start with Wacko, Yacko, and Dot: "I don't think it was just *Animaniacs* or *Tiny Toons*. I think the popularity of *Ren And Stimpy* helped bring funny cartoons back. It's getting very competitive: Fox tries different things, *Eek* [*The Cat*, also written by Kopp] is a pretty weird show; then you've got Nickelodeon which is trying strange, odd things. It's just a matter of keeping up with the Joneses. Disney wasn't really in that market; their cartoons appealed to the really younger kid. They wanted to open up their market a little more."

What does it take to blaze a path into that older market (and maybe court a few adults in the process)? In Disney's case it's weekly half-hours featuring three separate cartoons: *Shnookums And Meat*, dog-and-cat slapstick in an updated-for-the-'90s, Looney Tunes-style; plus *Pith Possum: Super-Dynamic Possum Of Tomorrow*, a mid-'60s *Batman* satire; and *Tex Tinstar: Best Of The West*, a stylized cliff-hanger,

***Shnookums And Meat*: dog-and-cat slapstick in an updated-for-the-'90s, Looney Tunes-style.**



Shnookums & Meat creators
Bill Kopp (top) and Jeff DeGrandis

starring a sheriff who's part-time hero and full-time Elvis impersonator. Scripted by Kopp, directed by DeGrandis and produced by both (though some sense of decorum has compelled them to opt for pseudonyms in the credits of the *Tex Tinstar* segments), the cartoons profit mightily from the lavish production skills of Disney's Japanese studio (unlike *Animaniacs*, whose Asian suppliers seem stymied every time they have to do an eyetake, the Disney artists—as well as the New Zealand studio that does the *Tex Tinstar* segments—handle the demands of squash and stretch with sublime craftsmanship), and Kopp's uninhibited writing style, which mixes a keen eye for satire with a too-long-absent appreciation for sheer nuttiness (what kind of mind is needed to stall an entire *Pith Possum* episode because your superhero can't figure out how to get out of his garage?).

Shnookums And Meat made its debut in 1993 as a portion of CBS' *Marsupilami* show (a very small portion: Disney only ordered five of the dog-and-cat cartoons).

"They'd seen *Eek The Cat*," said Kopp. "They said, 'Will you do a show for us?' and at first I turned them down, because I had worked with Disney before and it wasn't exactly the place you went to do funny stuff. Once they convinced me that they would stay out of the way, I took a chance on it. And they did allow us to do our thing, and that's why I'm very happy with it. I think it's my best work to date.

"The only thing they told us was to make it funny. But we'd start getting stuff back and then they would ask me, 'Is that funny?' They got really worried about some of it: 'Well, is that funny, though?' I'd go, 'Yeah, yeah, it's funny.' 'Oh, okay!'"

More curious than Disney's insecurity over what actually might make people laugh is the fact that, with *Shnookums And Meat*, two men are in charge of three cartoons boasting three very distinct styles: from the conventional character animation of *Pith Possum* to *Shnookums And Meat*'s abstract suburbanism to *Tex Tinstar*'s surreal frontiers.

"It's kind of like the more bang for your buck," said Kopp. "We don't get bored with it, and we just try to give as much as we can, entertainment-wise. It allows us as artists to work on really different stuff. Pitching them the idea of having three cartoons that are different was difficult, though. It was an alien concept to them, but I kept thinking about the old *Rocky And Bullwinkle* show. When I was little I liked all those different things, *Fractured Fairy Tales* and *Dudley Do-Right*. I liked the fact that you got all those weird things in one half hour. So, we just tried to take that kind of philosophy and apply it to the storytelling style and the design-style of this."

"We went after Animaniacs in one episode," said producer/writer Bill Kopp. Disney didn't think it was a good idea.

How does Kopp manage to write 39 separate cartoons in three different styles? "Most of them start with a simple premise or a situation, and you can just build on it. The great thing about writing shorts is that if anyone causes a story problem, you can just drop a piano on him. You don't have to be responsible for telling a real story, it's a great refuge. If a story is really having difficulty coming out, I can make it take a hard left and just go in some weird direction."

The big question is: Now that Disney has given their viewers a taste of cartooning that doesn't automatically hype the benefits of respecting your elders and eating your vegetables, will the corporation bite for a second, thirteen-episode season? Not even Kopp could answer that one: "We can't figure it out. We thought we would be picked up right away; in December, we were ready to go. And they just wouldn't do it. Our ratings are even higher than *Gargoyles*, already. After only being on the air for a month. I don't know what they're waiting for. It's a mystery to me. If they told me to start writing back in December; I could have ten more scripts done."✱

8, 1954. *Operation Undersea* was a fascinating look at the making of Disney's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. An unabashed hour-long trailer for the film, the program actually won an Emmy as the Best Individual Program of the Year.

The Wonderful World of Disney which eventually played on all three major networks became the longest-running show in primetime television.

In later years, *Disneyland* spent less time with the animated characters and more with original programming, the most famous of which was the Davey Crockett series which started a new trend going from television to theatrical release.

Never forgetting that a primary goal of *Disneyland* was to market feature films, the studio released several shows in Europe where *Disneyland* hadn't penetrated. *Mars and Beyond*, *The Goofy Sports Story*, and *The Tricks of Our Trade* as well as others found an audience in European theaters. The show eventually changed its name to *The Wonderful World of Color* and then *The Wonderful World of Disney*. In its various incarnations—which eventually played on all three major networks—the Disney program became the longest-running show in primetime television.

A year after *Disneyland* hit the air, Disney produced a second series for the small screen which was designed for children and telecast with an after school format. For five days a week on *The Mickey Mouse Club*, Annette Funicello and gang cavorted in a child's world of song and dance and of course Mouse Cartoon Time, which served up a host of vintage Disney cartoons and some original shorts along with helpful hints from Jiminy Cricket.

While Walt felt strongly about the potential of television, his brother Roy was less enthusiastic. Looking to television as a means to finance his park, Disney had originally bought the rights to Johnston McCulley's Zorro character with his personal bankroll, planning to build the park with the profits from the show. However, the deal with ABC gave him the necessary funding and *Zorro* was placed on the back burner. By 1957, Disney was ready for another sortie into primetime television and the black-capped, sword-wielding form of Zorro bounded onto Thursday nights. Using a Mexican town built on the studio backlot, Guy Williams starred as the daring Don Diego de la Vega who fought crime and injustice as the masked Zorro. For two years, the character rode up and down the trails of old California.

The Lean Years

Unfortunately, Disney's initial success on television was followed by a lackluster performance for the next twenty years.

When the primetime access rule went into effect in the early '70s the studio entered the fray with the *Mouse Factory*, a syndicated show for which they had high hopes for. Disappointedly, it lasted only two seasons. After a string of short lived series including *Zorro and Son*, *Herbie the Love Bug*, and *Gun Shy*, a TV version of its *Apple Dumpling Gang* films Disney decided to reevaluate their direction in television.

NBC approached the studio with a proposal to do an anthology series with revolving characters akin to the network's *Mystery Movie* where they rotated *McMillan and Wife*, *Columbo*, and *McCloud*. Disney seriously considered doing that with

***The Little Mermaid* was the first of the animated movies to score big on TV as well.**

The Dream is Realized:
Disney displays a
model of Disneyland.

Disney wins the Emmy for Operation Under Sea

Elfego Baca, *Witch Mountain* and two others, but finally decided against it.

The studio tried *Small and Frye* with Darren McGavin as a shrinking detective, which ran in the Spring of 1983 and *Wild Side*, a one-hour western series about a town whose special agents are the Chamber of Commerce. A sort of group version of *Wild Wild West*. Nothing happened.

The Empire Begins

At that time, Jim Jimirro—the head of the Walt Disney Telecommunications and Non-Theatrical division—came up with the idea of a pay TV channel. In 1981, Disney and Westinghouse announced they would partner for the cable network venture. Westinghouse would provide satellites and some of the financing and Disney would provide the programming. Westinghouse, however, got annoyed with the studio because Disney was getting more publicity than they were. In a role reversal of the 1944 split between RCA and Disney, Westinghouse pulled out. Disney continued on its own and the Disney Channel premiered in 1983.

Since the studio had failed of late to create any hits shows for either the networks or syndication, it decided to not compete with itself and instead focus exclusively on the cable programming.

When the Disney Channel became a major cable success story, the studio took another look at network outlets with a string of programs aimed as mid-season replacements. *Harry* with Alan Arkin, *The Ellen Burstyn Show*, *Sidekicks*, *Down and Out In Beverly Hills* and *The Oldest Rookie* all came and went. The studio finally hit paydirt with *The Golden Girls* in September 1985.

Disney's Television Animation division however was languishing in Never Never Land since the company had abandoned broadcast outlets. Talk of a new series called *The Wuzzels* seemed to be just that. Talk. Gary Krisel, president of the division, felt that they shouldn't loose track of the children in homes without cable. When Michael Eisner arrived at the studio he agreed with Krisel and the TV animation unit was revitalized.

Then, there was Saturday morning TV. "Disney didn't know what they wanted to do," said historian Bob Cotter. "So they looked at the Saturday morning market carefully and put together a special task force to see if they wanted to do a *Bugs Bunny-Road Runner*-type show, taking some of the old animation and linking it together with new bridges. People just didn't feel that would work. Instead, they went into Saturday morning animation with *The Wuzzels* and *The Adventures of the Gummi Bears* for the 1985-86 season."

"TV is one of the avenues to retain a relationship with the public," said Krisel. "Eisner suggested that we do something with the Gummi Bears. The idea behind it had nothing to do with selling candy or anything like that. It had to do with the myth and why someone would ever make

> There was a new standard at the networks
> who compared everything to Disney
> and pushed other producers
> for the same quality.
> That was the great evolution
> in television animation.

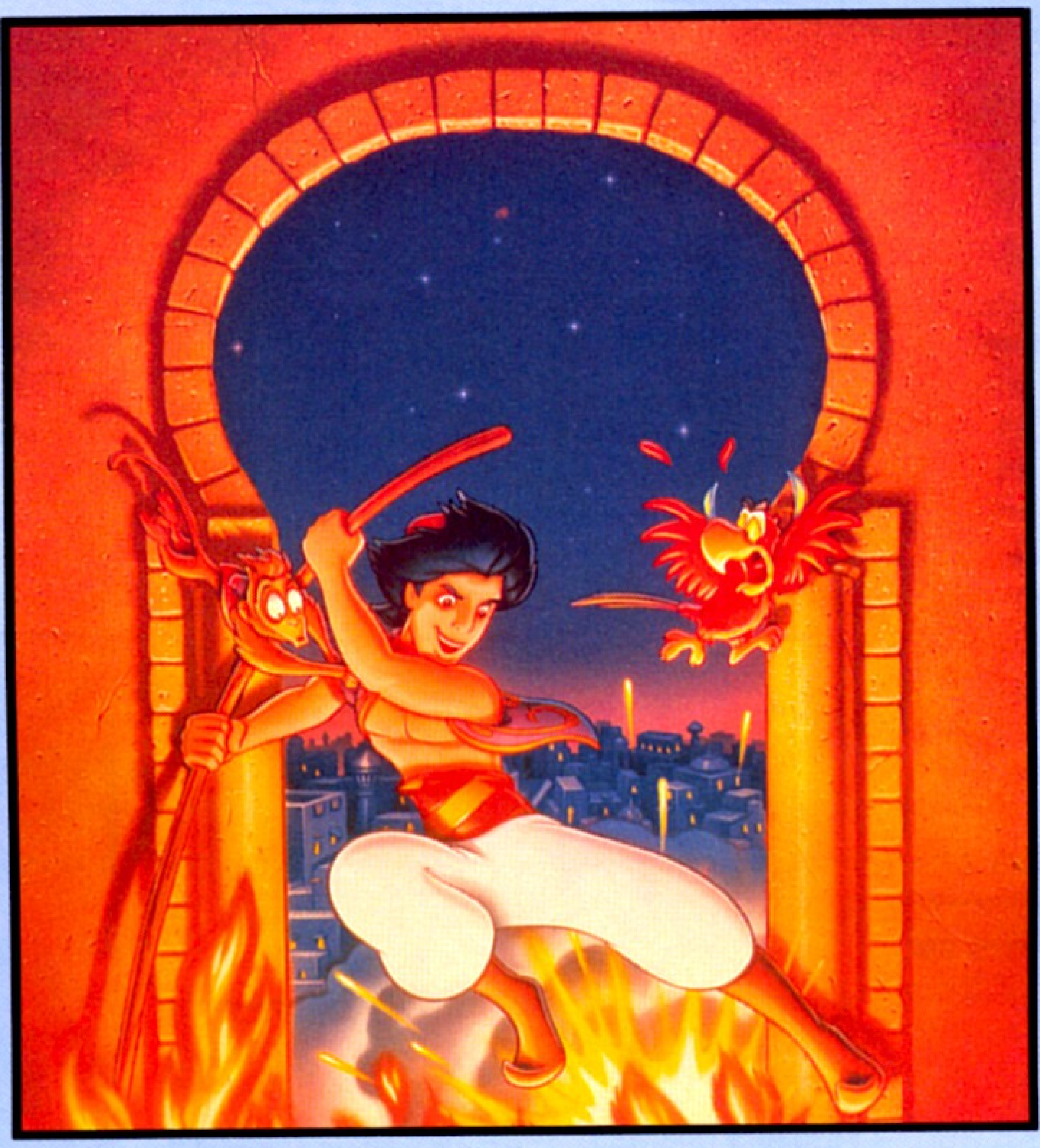
Disney's Return of Jafar. Direct-to-Video Watershed

By Dan Scapperotti

The story of Disney's *Return of Jafar*, the most successful direct-to-video release of all time, begins with the success of its predecessor, *Aladdin*.

"*The Return of Jafar* was a video sequel that made much more than most films released in theaters," said the film's co-producer Tad Stones. "When you have a film that makes over $200 million, people talk sequel."

With *Aladdin* a smash hit in theaters, the Walt Disney Company—never one to leave any avenue unexplored—decided to bring the popular characters to television in an *Aladdin* series.



Aladdin jumps from screen to video to TV in a single leap.

Stones, a twenty-year studio veteran, was tapped along with Alan Zaslove to co-produce and direct the series. A graduate of the Disney training program, Stones had worked in various capacities on *Duck Tales*, *The Gummi Bears*, *Chip and Dale—Rescue Rangers* and had just completed a stint as creator and supervising producer on *Darkwing Duck* when *Aladdin* came calling.

As Stones, Zaslove and their team began to decide which characters to use, they realized that to do the series they wanted, they would first have to create a bridge from the movie.

"I wanted to use [the parrot] Iago, but at the end of the original movie, he was trapped in the lamp," said Stones. "I realized that I was going to have to create a sequel to *Aladdin* to set up the series."

While the classic animated features continued to be perennial favorites with family audiences, Disney's Homevideo division yearned to get into the direct-to-homevideo market with original productions. The *Aladdin* scenerio seemed to offer them the opportunity.

"While we were developing the series, on a whole separate venue, we were developing this movie, *The Return of Jafar*," said Stones. "It was the same as doing four episodes—about 88 minutes." (The film actually runs a little shorter at 66 minutes.)

The Return of Jafar finds Jafar and his sidekick parrot, Iago, still trapped in the magic lamp. The parrot manages to escape, but leaves his ruthless master behind. A chance meeting with Aladdin lands Iago in the Sultan's palace while a desert thief named Abis Mal finds the lamp and releases Jafar. The two form a vengeful alliance, flamed by their hate for Aladdin.

Jafar's animation was done in Disney-owned studios in Japan and Australia. Although filmed abroad, planning and control was centered in Disney's California headquarters. The Disney Television Animation Department oversaw all the preproduction on the films including recording the voices, creating the storyboards and choosing the colors of every costume and every prop.

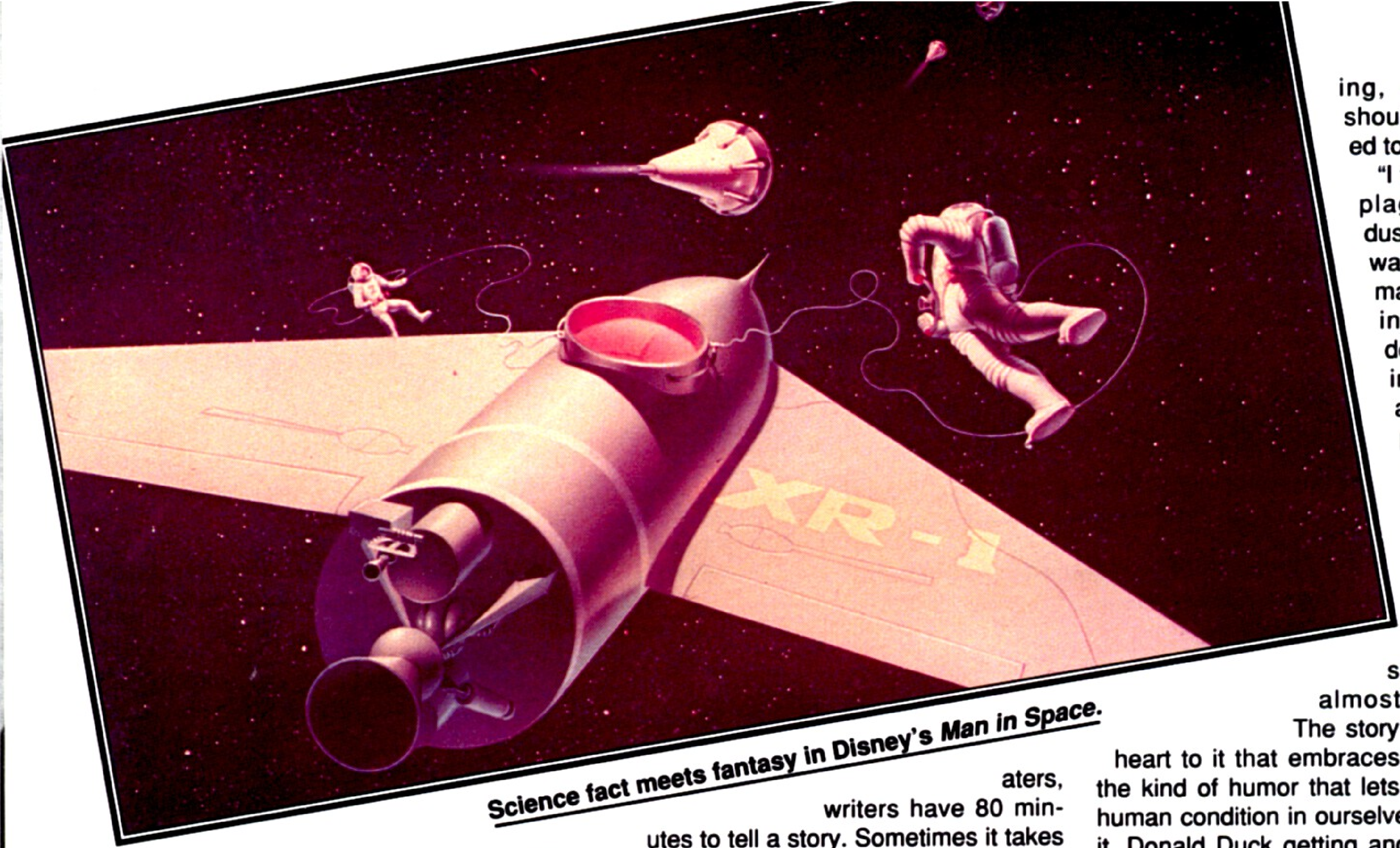
"We do key backgrounds and key layouts," said Stones, "and as much planning as we can before shipping to them. They get a huge package over there of mouth charts and expressions and model sheets and motion breakdowns and then of course that has to be interpreted by animators overseas.

"The people at Disney features are able to test a scene, rework it and then show it to the director," said Stones. "The director can give notes. They can rework it again. They just have more time per scene. There is also a lot more planning going in before that scene reaches the animator's desk. We do in about a year and a half what they do in four years."

Television animation has taken some giant steps over the last few years. With the artistic envelope constantly moving, producers are forced by the marketplace to further enhance their product.

With that in mind, Stones is producing and directing the next installment of the Aladdin saga, *Aladdin, King of Thieves*, a new direct-to-video feature now in production.

"After *Jafar*'s success we're spending a lot more time and a lot more money because the ground has been tested and we found that these things can be successful and frankly we want to drastically improve the quality so it's much better than anything you see on television. We want people say why didn't they put this out in theaters?"✱



Science fact meets fantasy in Disney's *Man in Space.*

the candy."

After only five weeks, *The Gummi Bears* won its time slot and secured the position for the next four years, despite being up against some formidable competition, including *The Wuzzels*. Having two of its shows going head to head taught the division its first big lesson in television.

"We never want to be head-to-head with our own programming again," said Krisel. "That led to the idea of the Disney Afternoon because as we began doing more programming we talked about how to avoid a situation where we have Disney competing with Disney. The Disney Afternoon, a block of programs on one outlet, was the answer to that."

The success of *The Gummi Bears* set Krisel's division on the fast track. *Winnie the Pooh* had a long, successful run on ABC. *Duck Tales*, which premiered as a two-hour special in September 1987, was Disney's first syndicated show and became the catalyst for the Disney Afternoon.

"*Duck Tales* really raised the standard of animation," said Krisel. "Each year it's gotten better and better and more competitive throughout the industry. It used to be that every producer was saying they had the best animation, but once *The Gummi Bears* and *Duck Tales* came on, the debate stopped. There was a new standard at the networks which compared everything to Disney and pushed other producers for the same quality. That was the great evolution in television animation."

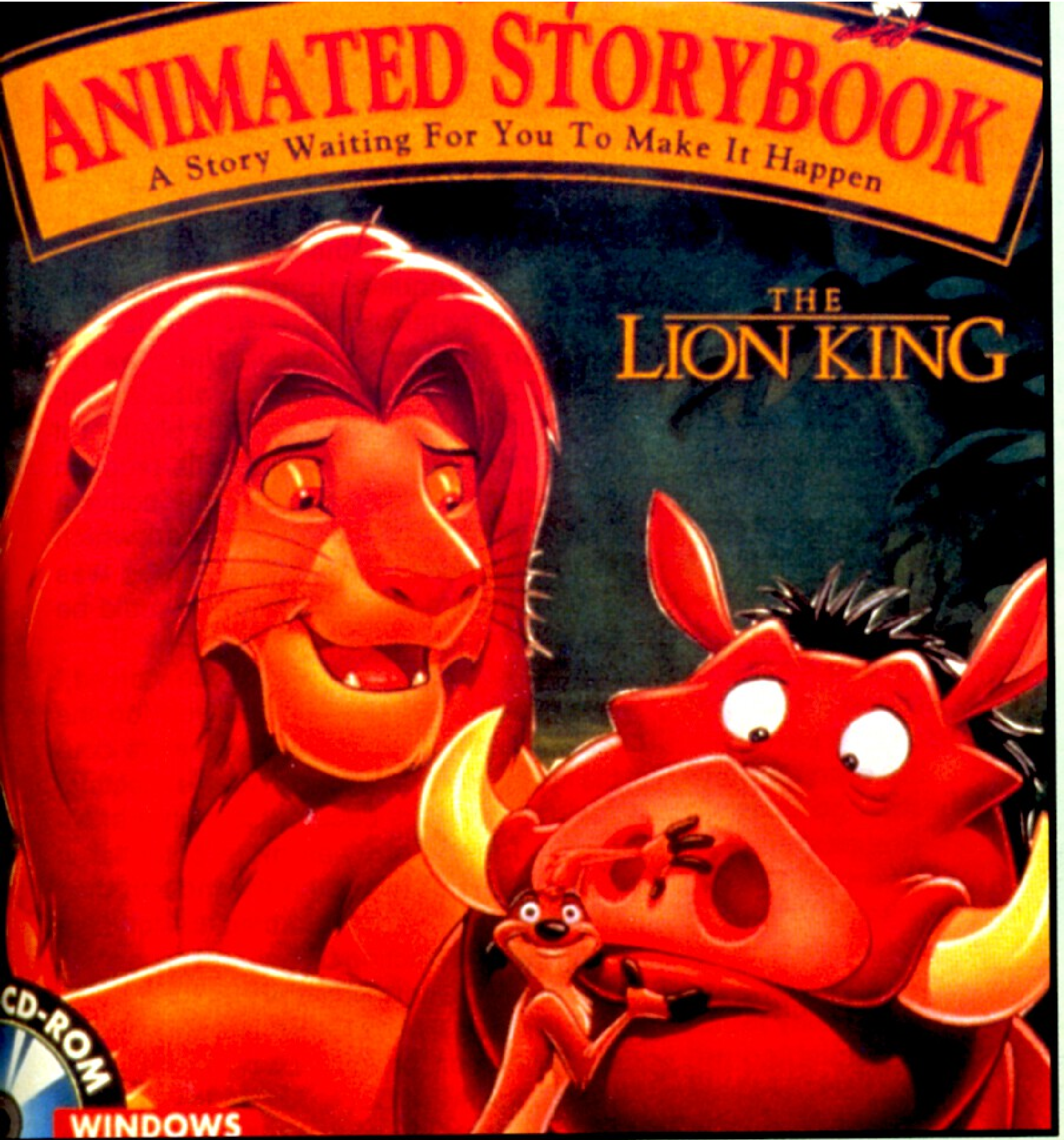
There is a world of difference between theatrical and television animation. In theaters, writers have 80 minutes to tell a story. Sometimes it takes two years to develop the storyline. Television confines them to 22 minutes. Production motivation also plays a large part in guiding the process. Why are you making the show? According to Krisel, if you're making the show to entertain, then everything about it from story telling, casting, and artwork should be dedicated to that.

"I think what was plaguing the industry at that time was the fact that many shows being made were dedicated to the introduction of additional toy products," said Krisel. "That doesn't inspire creativity. You would see shows where character personality was almost nonexistent. The story has to have a heart to it that embraces mankind. It's the kind of humor that lets us look at the human condition in ourselves and laugh at it. Donald Duck getting angry is the point that we all get annoyed at inanimate objects. The frustration of raising a window or putting air in our tires. We're not laughing at Donald Duck. We're laughing at that foible of the human condition. That may be more significant than animation. But in order to deliver ideas

Continued on p.42

Disney TV

Vintage Disney: *The Mickey Mouse Club, Alice in Wonderland* and *Zorro.*



The Lion King roars onto CD-ROM.

Disney's Lion King Goes Interactive

By Dan Persons

You can't tell the people at Disney anything about synergy they don't already know. Decades before Time/Warner discovered the word, the Mouse House was spinning their properties into a mammoth inventory of record albums, storybooks and fruit juices. When it came to computer software, though, the company's efforts had been somewhat less than high-profile. Disney has released numerous titles in the past few years, but none managed to come close to the earth-shaking sales figures of their theatrical efforts.

All that changed with the release of *The Lion King Animated Storybook.*

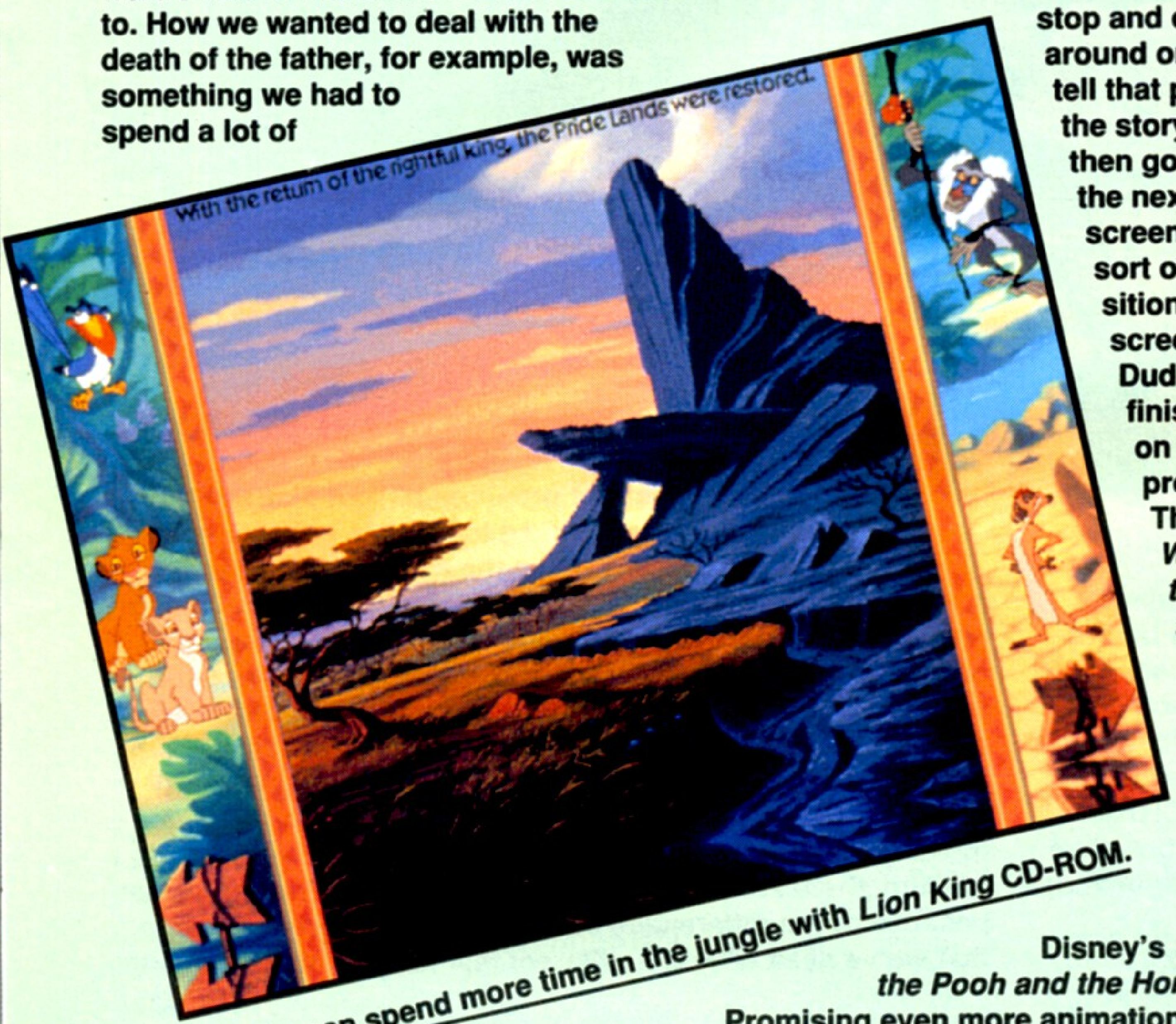
Disney's first venture into interactive, CD-ROM software, *The Lion King* takes its cues from such predecessors as *Howie Mandell's Tuneland* and the Broderbund series of interactive storybooks: using the standard word-and-picture storybook as a base, the disc then beefs things up with a dramatic soundtrack and interactive illustrations. What separates Disney's title from the competitors is not only artwork and animation that, despite the restrictions of PC platforms, come close to rivaling the lushness of the feature-length *Lion King,* but also a story with more substance than one usually finds spinning in a double-speed drive. "A lot of it has to do with the strength of the story," explained Noah Dudley, producer of the disc (as well as Disney's previous *Animation Studio*). "I think that we have an extremely powerful story here, more so than the other products I've seen. I think the depth of the animation and the quality of the animation is something that'd be very hard to duplicate, just because we have that kind of facility. The form is not what differentiates it. It's what we did with the form."

Though the disc was prepared almost simultaneously with the film— according to Dudley, animation was nowhere near complete as the project got underway—it was decided that footage from the feature itself would not be sampled. Instead, animation was handled by an outside group, Creative Capers, while Media Station developed the project. The result, said Dudley, was a narrative that tied closely to what kids would see in the theater, while capitalizing on the power of interactivity: "It doesn't branch off in terms of the story. We're telling exactly the same story as the movie. But in the same way you'd do a book version of the film, there are things that are emphasized differently, just because of the differences in the medium. There are things that we've dealt with in a different fashion, because we wanted to take advantage of what our medium had to offer. For example, as you're going through the book, there are lots of times you can stop and interact with what's going on, on the page. When Simba is living with Pumba and Timon, we stop and you can click and bring out all sorts of bug jokes—I

How we wanted to deal with the death of the father was something we had to spend a lot of time discussing.

shouldn't say bug jokes—bug routines that they didn't have in the film just because that wasn't the thrust of the story they were trying to tell. But we wanted to give the kids the opportunity to act inside the jungle environment, so we stopped and did that.

But the jungle is not always the most hospitable environment for children, especially when it's used as backdrop for a story that includes fratricide and the despoiling of a delicate ecosystem. Translating these themes into a product targeted for a young audience proved to be Dudley's greatest challenge. "There were a lots of decisions we had to come to. How we wanted to deal with the death of the father, for example, was something we had to spend a lot of time discussing. We knew that this was going to be a product that was going to be played with by fairly young children, and, while it's an important part of the story, we didn't want it to he overwhelming to the children. I think there's a difference between seeing it happen on film, where the action continues past it, and stopping and having a child sit there with it. So we had to think of different ways of dealing with it.


With the return of the rightful king, the Pride Lands were restored.

Kids can spend more time in the jungle with Lion King CD-ROM.

"We had artists do all different kinds of storyboards, and lots of different sorts of treatments before we came up with a way that we liked. We had a lot of different shots we could have used; what was the best angle to show all this from; how much emphasis we wanted to place on the father. We talked about not including it at all, which we didn't feel was appropriate; we talked about showing purely Simba's reaction to it, rather than showing anything of the father at all.

"What we ended up with is seeing the father push Simba up onto the rock and then fall back out of frame, and then see the wildebeests charge on by. We ended up with a screen that is not interactive: we tell the story—we don't actually show the father being trampled, which the film doesn't, either, but once that part of the story is over, we keep moving. This is not a screen that the child is invited to stop and click around on. We tell that part of the story and then go on to the next screen. It's sort of a transitional screen."

Dudley is finishing up on his next project: *The Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree Animated Storybook,* based on Disney's *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree.* Promising even more animation and interactivity than *The Lion King,* the second disc, says the producer, owes most of its entertainment power to what was learned on King: "Because *[The Lion King]* was our first CD-ROM project, we were setting up processes as we went. *Winnie the Pooh* is going much more smoothly as the result of knowing who to talk to when. Also, learning the limitations of a CD-ROM title as opposed to a floppy title has been interesting — load times and that sort of thing, and how you deal with those issues, have all been things we've learned as a result of this process.

"You know, whenever you look at a product, you say, 'Oh, yeah. I wish I'd done that.' On the whole, I'm very satisfied with the product. I look at it and I like what I see."*

like that, or conflicts like that, you need a pretty high quality of acting. But in order to get the good acting you need a pretty high quality of animation or none of it really works. Because of the type of characters we do, we require a pretty high level of animation for television."

When Disney proposed the idea for *Duck Tales*, the marketplace was skeptical. In fact they were told simply that it would not work. Every successful program was a boys action show, ran the conventional wisdom. Boys determined which shows worked. The market place was already crowded. The program would be too soft.

"That was how the marketplace worked," continued Krisel. "When we went on the air our numbers for *Duck Tales* were double what the marketplace was expecting. And the numbers became so high that we realized that there was more potential in the animation realm than the industry had given it credit. This enabled us to raise budgets by attracting bigger audiences."

An Animation Revolution

Duck Tales became so popular, a theatrical motion picture, *Duck Tales—The Movie*, followed. *Duck Tales* also became the well from which the Disney Afternoon concept sprung. It was quickly followed by *Chip and Dale Rescue Rangers*, *The Goof Troop*, *Tale Spin* and *Darkwing Duck*.

"*Darkwing Duck* evolved a little out of *Duck Tales*," said Krisel. "There were a couple of episodes of *Duck Tales* that were sort of a superhero, superagent send-up and we liked the way they felt and they played. We liked the elements in that and it evolved into a new character for us. It was broader cartooning than on some other shows."

"Yeah, I'm Darkwing's dad," said Tad Stones, the creator and supervising producer of the show. "I was told to develop a show called *Double-O Duck* and *Secret Agent Duck*. I really wasn't interested in that at all and I sort of put it through as a James Bond parody."

When Jeffrey Katzenberg saw the result, he wasn't pleased. He complained that the concept had already been run into the ground and that it failed to provide characters the audience would care about.

Stones was eager to drop the project, but Katzenberg sent him back to the drawing board. "At that point I had to throw out the whole secret agent thing," he said, "and just started talking about a duck hero. We started from scratch and began looking at pulp and radio heroes and it developed into *Darkwing Duck*. It didn't really click until we came up with the idea of a guy whose entire life is the obsession with being a hero and suddenly he finds himself with a daughter to raise. That gave us the human interest side of it. We had stories with warmth and heart to them and it *still* was the wackiest thing that Disney Afternoon had done, up to that time."

Generally the studio had not capitalized on its animated features as far as the small screen was concerned. That changed with the success of *The Little Mermaid*.

"Initially I wasn't much in favor of it," he admitted. "Again, the conventional wisdom at the time was that girls' shows don't work on television. But, the audience wanted it so much that the networks wanted it. So, we had to decide how to do it."

The film had ended with Eric and Ariel being married. The studio saw little to interest its young Saturday morning viewers in Ariel's domestic life being married to Eric, so they decided to make it a prattler and maintain her adventures in the undersea realm.

Aladdin, the series, met with more enthusiasm among Krisel and his staff at the animation studio. "*Aladdin* is a story that lends itself to a lot of storytelling situations," said Krisel. "and that makes a perfect television series."

For the series, the studio was able to bring back the voice talent used in the feature film—with the exception, of course, of Robin Williams. Scott Weinger (Aladdin), Gilbert Gottfried (Iago), Frank Welker (Abu) and Linda Larkin (Jasmine) were on hand, but Dan Castellaneta (Homer of *The Simpsons*) was brought in to fill the considerable slippers abandoned by Williams as the Genie.

The two latest entries from Disney's television animation stable—*Gargoyles and The Shnookums & Meat Funny Cartoon Show*—display a new direction for the studio.

"We were responding to two things with these shows," said Krisel. "One. We wanted more variety in the afternoon and, two, it allowed us to repeat episodes fewer times. We wanted to try some shows that were a little more off center for us. A very dramatic show in *Gargoyles* and a very very broad comedy in *Shnookums and Meat*."

An ancient race of beings, the Gargoyles are stone by day that turn into horrible creatures at the sunset. One clan of these beings guarded a Scottish castle, protecting it from the ravages of Viking attacks. Condemned by a sorcerer's spell to sleeping day and night until "the castle rises above the clouds," the Gargoyles return when the castle is transported to Manhattan and rebuilt atop a towering skyscraper. They become crimefighters against 20th century villains.

While artwork on the series garners images of *Batman*, Krisel denies any real similarities. "*Batman* is a very sparse design," he pointed out. "They both take place at night. They both have a dark look. Ours has a dark look because our characters only come alive at night. But ours has a very different approach. Our city is full of lights and people and has the sense of a modern contemporary city. *Batman*'s view of Gotham City is more desolate and there's nobody around. It's very simplified shapes.

"This is our first purely dramatic series. We study the complexities and ambiguities of what it's like to be a hero, even a despised hero as the Gargoyles are."

The show has become so successful that next season it will be on five days a week.

Earlier this year, Krisel announced that Disney would turned its biggest hit ever—*The Lion King*—into a weekly series. *Timon & Pumba* will join the Disney Afternoon this fall. with Broadway actors Nathan Lane and Ernie Sabella reprising their film roles as the respective voices of Timon and Pumba. Thirteen episodes, each comprised of two 11-minute segments, have been ordered. Unlike *The Lion King*, however, Disney is calling the new series "pure gag-driven comedy."

"The things that set Disney apart are character and story development," said Krisel, of the studio's current success on television. "Most importantly, the point of view with which we approached a story can be described as heart and humor." ✱

The Disney Universe comes to your home via TV.

VideoScreen

By Douglas Eby

Of Unknown Origin

Low-Budget, Direct-to-Video Underwater Sci-Fi Adventure From The Master, Roger Corman

With its setting in an underwater mining facility in the year 2050, a crew living in quarters that may be a little too close, and the crisis of super intelligent alien creatures capable of taking over their bodies and using subtle mind control, Concorde/New Horizons' *Of Unknown Origin* has plenty of dramatic conflict.

The aliens had, at first, attacked a neighboring Russian facility under the Bering Strait, and were taken aboard the American base before anyone understood that the people being rescued harbored deadly and cunning alien parasites. Having very high metabolism, the creatures rapidly waste away their host human bodies.

A fiery end in *Of Unknown Origin*.

Writer Alex Simon has long been inspired by this rich genre of film, and noted, "The great thing about science fiction is there are no rules. If I want to have a uranium mine 5000 feet underwater, I can have it. If I want to have it populated by green guys with three heads, that's possible too. The only boundaries are how far my mind can take it."

In this story the viewer doesn't get the three-headed guys, but rather a dynamic mix of male and female miners, technicians and scientists with very genuine human qualities.

Simon created the compelling leading female role modeled after a best friend of his, "a tough, beautiful, smart lady in the film business," noting that he really likes women, has a lot of female friends, and thinks there is a real need for stronger roles. "Women are a lot stronger internally than men give them credit for," said Simon.

Another of the major roles he created, played by Roddy McDowall, is the base physician and research scientist Dr. Lazarus, who has frustrated dreams of winning a Nobel Prize. Simon considers the character "not a bad guy, but he kind of gets corrupted by his own ambition. Some of the most bitter people in the world are the most brilliant."

Simon was assigned by the Roger Corman studio to develop "an underwater sci-fi monster movie" that, like a number of other productions at the busy studio, could take advantage of existing sets—in this case, the relatively elaborate ones originally built for *Carnosaur II*.

Also, as co-producer Bill Bromiley notes, Roger Corman decided that another kind of film originally scheduled at the time was not the best selling type, "so we decided to move into the sci-fi genre, which he's known for, and we can get done fairly quickly and cheaply."

> **"The great thing about science fiction is there are no rules. The only boundaries are how far my mind can take it."**
>
> **—Writer Alex Simon**

Just six weeks after that decision, they had a finished script, and were rolling. The designers and crew ingeniously fashioned great-looking futuristic sets with simple materials, such as walls that turn out to be covered with spray-painted Styrofoam sandwich boxes.

Alex Hyde-White (*The Fantastic Four*, *Pretty Woman*) plays the ex-military base commander, Pickett. "He's perhaps a bit of a Captain Queeg in the making, but is generally well-liked," said the actor. "He's a 1950's man a hundred years into the future." Hyde-White has been acting for sixteen years, and was one of the last contract players at Universal. Commenting on what it has been like for him to work on three Roger Corman projects, he said that except for the greater noise problems and a greater sensitivity to budget, "The set and the camera and the film are the same. As an actor, my goal is to act as if it were a $40 million dollar picture, not a $4 million dollar one. I think this is the most comfortable film set of its kind that I've ever been on, because of the energy and enthusiasm, and the respect of the crew."

Like many others in the cast and crew, Hyde-White appreciated the chance to work with Roddy McDowall: "He is a conduit to the 'real' Hollywood, because he's still active, still a player, and you ask him about working with someone, he can sum up his experience with just a look. An actor who's blessed with that ability to communicate without words is inspiring to be around."

As second-in-command officer Catherine Harding, Melanie Shatner (*Subspecies II* and *III*; *Star Trek V*) said she appreciates the script defining her as a trainee: "That really helped me in my whole idea of my character, because here she was in a mining facility full of men, all of whom have been at this longer than she, and she's in her position because of the schooling she's had. She's still learning, and earning the respect of the rest of the crew. But she has to prove herself. She's a little insecure when it starts, and she progressively gets a little more aggressive and more secure. But you never lose sight of how smart she is."

Shatner very much liked the leadership qualities of her role: "I've played a lot of strong women and I think what that really means is a woman who is intelligent, and is fighting for something that is really important to her, whether that's survival for her or for somebody else. But I don't think it necessarily means she becomes this aggressive, mean bitch. I don't want to play that. I think it's very important to stay a woman. It really excited me to play someone as smart as she was—but uncomfortable having to gain the acceptance of these guys, then ultimately not having to care what they thought, because there's something too dangerous going on to care what they're thinking."

Another crew member is the android Brill, played by Emile Levisetti (*An American Love*, *...About Last Night*), who described him as "human in all respects, except with a very limited emotional capacity. I speak very softly, always controlled. The challenge was not letting myself be emotional, to maintain a distance."

Faced with the crisis of alien invasion like his human coworkers, the android had to be "curious, intrigued, but not feel fear—it's a fine line, how to play concerned or interested, but not in an emotional way."

Levisetti also found the studio and other cast and crew made for a very positive experience: "Not that I wouldn't like to be in a big-budget movie, but there's a sense of camaraderie, of being 'in the trenches,' here. Everyone needs to do a good job, wants to do a good job."

Rodger Halston (*Dead Space*) plays

Wyatt, a character he describes as "a 2050 hippie cyberpunk, who's got some brains, but likes to smoke the catnip, as we're calling it in the picture. He's a bit of a wisecrack, probably very much of a kid at heart. Does a lot of impersonations. And he's real connected to the past—to the 1900's."

Halston said there were some people wearing jackets on the set that said, "Roger Corman School of Film" and thinks, "There are so many things you can learn from Roger's setup, what he does and how he operates, his attitude—how he can not get into the big budgets and still make a good project."

Halston also especially appreciated one of the cast: "When I found out Roddy McDowall was going to be on the picture, I considered it such an honor, because he's been around the industry so many years...to be able to work around him, watch him and gain some education about what I can do to keep my career going in the right direction. When you work with people like that it draws the energy up all the way around."

Described as a 21st-century yuppie and a thorough company man, Hawkes is played by Richard Biggs (*Babylon 5*), who describes his character as "not sure of himself, and not coming from an intellectual space, but more from fear, from adrenaline. He's doing something he's never done. He's not in control."

One of the "world-weary" underwater miners facing the alien invasion is Louis, played by Don Stroud, a veteran actor of over 100 films and 300 TV shows, including *License To Kill.*

"I thought my career would slow down at fifty, but this is my third film in a row," said Stroud. "I'm going to bring Roger a project—I've really come here to find my way as a director. I started as an actor with Roger, so it would be nice to start as a director with him. What I'd like to do is be an AD on one of these shows for free—come out here for a month, just to get a little more of where I'm going with the camera."

Having worked on a variety of other projects including *Johnny Mnemonic* and many commercials, Michael Burnett and his studio created the various creatures, as well as the human bodies used up and discarded by the aliens, which were fabricated in polyurethane foam from modified versions of his company's "Corpse Kit." This was the first time Burnett used gelatin as the skin for a mechanical creature. "It's much heavier, but it compresses more like real skin," said Burnett. "Also, in a scene where the creature comes out of a guy who's on fire, foam rubber would have just burned, but being gelatin it burned and melted at the same time so it had more of a real, fleshy kind of feel."

This is the second film for Concorde/New Horizons that Scott Levy has directed. He said he started "on the bottom," but moved up quickly to production manager, and has worked in a variety of capacities over his four-year stay with the company.

He's enthusiastic about working for a studio that has functioned for years as the career launch for so many distinguished actors and others, including, he noted, Oscar-winning *Schindler's List* director of photography Janusz Kaminski (who worked for Corman one-and-a-half years, including being a gaffer on over eight films).

One of the unavoidable aspects of shooting at this studio is noise from street traffic, barking dogs, jet roar. "This is one of the few companies that has PA's on airplane watch," said Levy. "It throws us all off, but it's just part of making movies in Venice."

Despite the lower budgets and less refined working conditions compared with more major studios, there is an atmosphere of passion and dedication here. As the director put it, "I think we're always trying to make the best possible looking film, and I think quite often it comes off."✱

Under Alien Attack: Humans fight back, above, with guns; opposite page, a flame thrower might do the trick.

CyberScreen Review

The Mask CD-ROM Restores the Edge

By Dan Persons

I MUST SHARE THESE POWERS WITH MANKIND, USE THEM TO PROTECT AND SERVE OTHERS IN NEED.
BUT FIRST.

***The Mask: The Origin* CD-ROM goes back to the comic's gritty roots.**

Jim Carrey is an undeniably talented comic actor who pretty much claimed 1994 as his own on the basis of three films, the surprise hit, *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* ($75 million), the expected hit, *Dumb and Dumber* ($140 million), and, of course, *The Mask* ($120 million).

The tale of a workaday shlub turned gaudy, ostensible crime-fighter, the Mask found its perfect personification in Carrey's classed-up Jerry Lewis shtick. The film was fun (and those ILM CGI effects were downright stunning), but the plot aped the excesses of most contemporary programmers—all set-pieces, little sense—and Carrey's persona so influenced the action that it seemed the character was "on" even when it wasn't called for.

The Mask, the movie, presented a character who might be one cool dude to have at parties, but was strictly lightweight as a super-hero.

This wasn't the way it was in the beginning: in the original Mask graphic novel published by Dark Horse, the character was darker, more prone to brandishing a MAC-10 than a punchline.

So when Cambrix Publishing released a CD-ROM version of the book, complete with voice-over dialogue, music, and a sprinkling of special effects, I was eager to see whether, in his original incarnation, the Mask possessed a depth only hinted at in the movie.

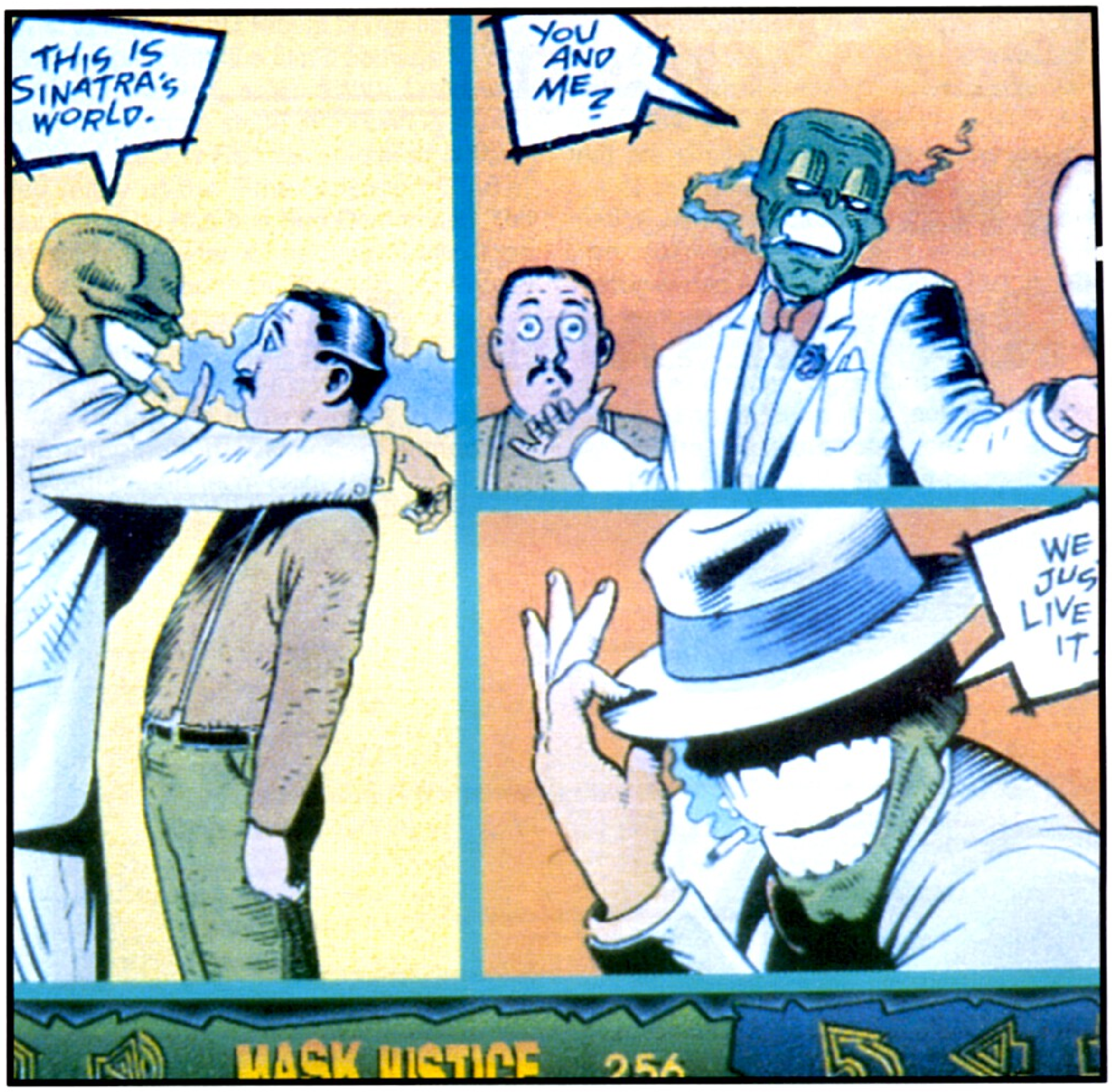
Here's a surprise: Stanley Ipkiss, the nebbish bank clerk played by Jim Carrey, is not the hero of *The Mask: The Origin.* Oh, he's there, all right, and in a prominent role, but he sure ain't the sweet-natured goof that moviegoers have come to love. He is, in fact, a rather ill-tempered creep, so furious at the petty injustices he's forced to endure that, once the Mask gets on his face, he turns into an unrepentant, and homicidal, bully boy.

For the initial chapters of the disc, his story serves as a sort of worse-case scenario, a way of demonstrating how *bad* things can get once the Mask takes control. But, Stanley's out of the picture not even halfway through the story's running time, his role usurped by none other than—get ready for the second surprise—Lieutenant Kellaway.

That's right: the detective who did little more than serve as a hapless foil for the movie's Mask is the *actual* hero of the Mask graphic novel. For the remainder of the disc, it's Kellaway who gets to morph into different personalities with unearthly ease, it's Kellaway who gets to drop the pop references, and it's Kellaway who strikes the dapper, Sinatra-esqe pose that so impressed the

New Line publicists that they liberated it for the film's poster. And, unlike the movie, where Ipkiss became a crime-fighter only by default (and, in one of the film's most inelegantly handled plot points, actually committed a crime himself), Kellaway has no qualms about applying the powers of the Mask to satisfy his sense of justice; though the results are not always healthy for either the Lieutenant, or for any innocent bystanders who happen to be in the area.

Having seen both movie and CD-ROM versions, I can now admit that there are a few things the movie has going for it. The film's stylized comedy of ambiguous identities, inept bank robbers, and luxurious nightclubs seems a better complement for the Mask's abstract personality than the novel's somewhat hackneyed assemblage of scumbag drug-dealers, two-timing D.A.'s and mob wars. And, by channeling the Mask's persona mostly through the imagery of animator Tex Avery, the film's producers were able to give the character a unity of motivation that's lacking in the novel's scattershot invocations of the likes of the Three Stooges, Mickey Mouse and *Blood and Sand*.


THIS IS SINATRA'S WORLD.
YOU AND ME?
WE JUS LIVE IT.
MASK JUSTICE 256

Panels from the CD-ROM display a graphic novel approach.

One thing comic and film do have in common: the loss of impetus anytime the Mask *isn't* on-stage. This is more of a problem in the film, where the cost involved in generating those elaborate special effects necessitated that such sequences be frugally deployed. No such money worries vex scripter John Arcudi or artist Doug Mahnke, who pretty much are free to have the Mask wail whenever and however they wish. Visually and conceptually, these moments are what the disc is about. Otherwise, when the story has to slog through the exposition of Kellaway pushing papers at the office or drug-dealer Rapaz making some odious deal in a plush restaurant, you can almost feel Mahnke straining to get back to the good stuff (all the way to the point where he occasionally gives otherwise 'normal' characters eye-takes that wouldn't be out-of-place in a *Ren and Stimpy* cartoon). Such stretches don't last long, just long enough to make one all-too-aware that the guy with the big, green head isn't around.

> Here's a surprise: Stanley Ipkiss is *not* the hero of *The Mask: The Origin.*

As for the disc itself, the packaging proclaims this, "A Breakthrough CD-ROM Adventure." This is true only if you have a very broad definition of "breakthrough."

Presentation boils down to what, in the film industry, is called animatics: a display of the comic's panels with an accompanying soundtrack. The producers have jazzed it up, somewhat: multiple panels spill across the screen as the tale unfolds, occasionally such digitized effects as color cycling or morphing are used to give the still images a bit of life (best example of this feature is a shattering window that occurs late in the story's run).

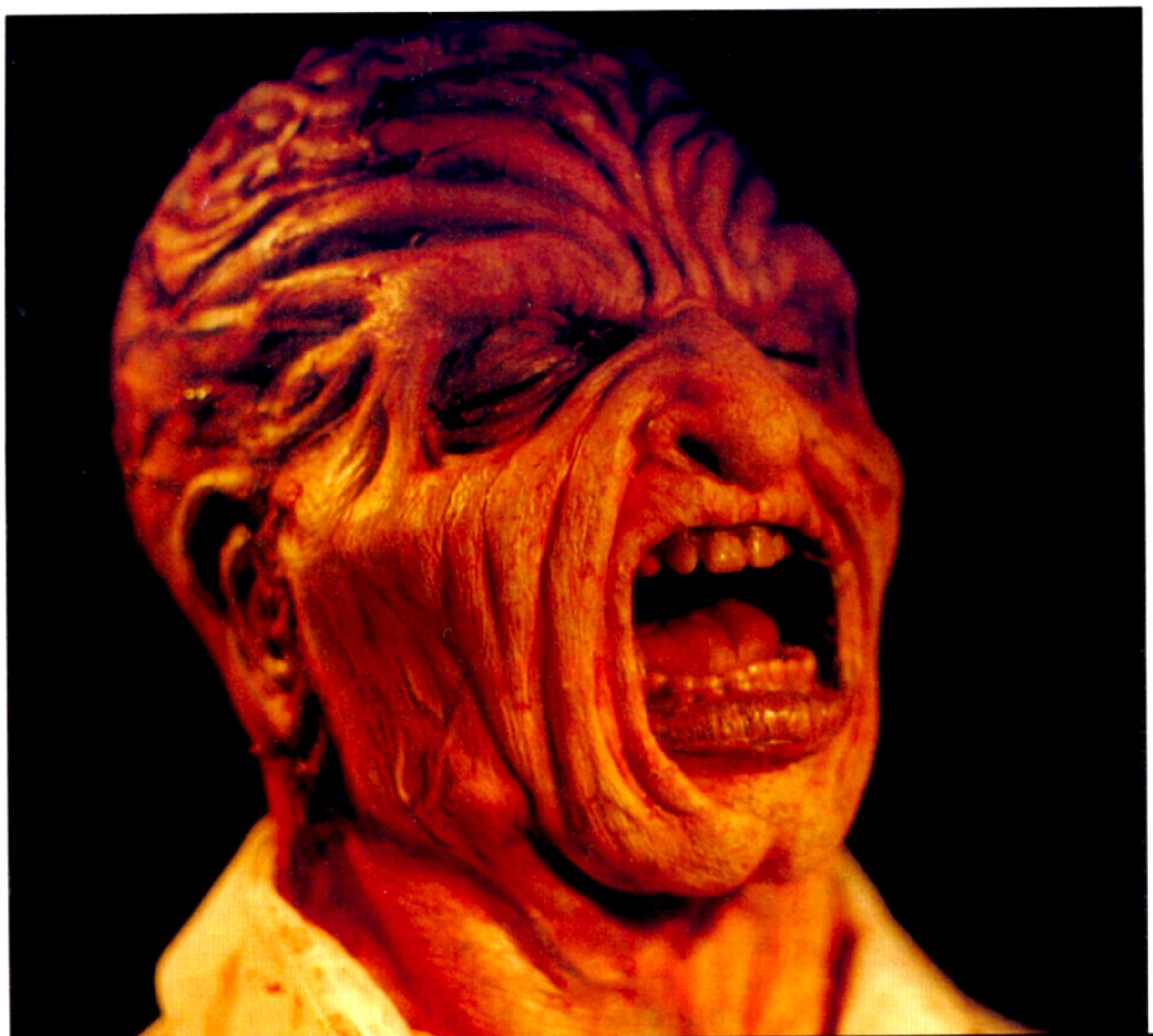
The soundtrack can be both blessing and curse, providing cues that the written dialogue can't (such as when the Mask defends Lieutenant Kellaway's actions in the equivocating tones of Richard Nixon) but also occasionally detracting from the moment (as when Ipkiss, watching some news footage of one of his atrocities, emits a malicious "hoo-hoo-hoo," the character's voice actor transforming the laugh into a sound not unlike that of an owl taking an unsuccessful stab at attitude).

As important as what's on this disc is what's missing. Even though more conventional graphic novels—those still distributed in that dinosaur of a medium, the printed book—can swing a few pages for some sketchbook art and other examples of a character's genesis, *The Mask: The Origin* presents us with the full-length comic, and little more. There's no rough art, no samples of Arcudi's script, there's not even a photo of the creatives involved. There are hints that this wasn't supposed to be the case: Mask creator Mike Richardson writes (again, in the booklet slipped into the jewel case, not on the disc itself) of several prior incarnations of the character in a way that suggests these were also to be included on the disc. If they're there, I couldn't find them. No doubt all those cool special effects—plus an especially awful rap song—took up the space that was meant for the additional material. I, for one, would have settled for less glitz and a lot more background.

THE REGENERATED MAN

By Dan Cziraky

Low-Budget Horror Film Inspired by Creature Features of the 1950's



At top, a mechanical head used in Regenerated Man; above, Arthur Lundquist as the monster; opposite page: scientists feverishly try to uncover the secrets of the Regenerated Man.

In a desolate industrial warehouse on the outskirts of Linden, New Jersey, a monster runs amok. It snarls, growls, and kills in bizarre fashion. It's also the star of its own movie, *The Regenerated Man*, a Filmline Communications/Austin Film Group production of a Ted A. Bohus film, produced by Ted A. Bohus and Danny Provenzano.

"The story's simple," said Bohus, who's directing from a script he co-wrote with Jack Smith. "It's about a scientist working on a serum to regenerate limbs. His chemicals get mixed together by two guys who break into his lab. They force him to drink the stuff to try and kill him, but instead he mutates into this creature that can do all these weird things. He can regenerate his tissue, so the skin can separate and the bones come out and 'fire', and bones come out from his fingertips and 'shoot.' He changes at night and keeps doing crazy stuff. He changes back during the day and tries to work on the antidote.

It's no accident that the plot vaguely resembles about a half-dozen science-fiction movies from the 1950's. Films such as *The Hideous Sun Demon* (1959) and *The Alligator People* (1959) were inspirations to writer/director/producer Bohus. "We wanted to see if we could do a low-budget monster movie, one with lots of effects," said Bohus.

Although likely to go straight to home video, Bohus wouldn't rule out a theatrical release for *The Regenerated Man*. "With Trimark releasing *Leprechaun* (theatrically) and doing pretty well with it, (independent distributors) are looking at low-budget monster films. If something looks good, then it stands a chance. For a while, they didn't want to take the chance. Now, they realize they stand to make $8 million on a film that cost under a million to make.

Bohus believes his latest film will ride the wave of current audience trends. "Monster movies are coming back," said Bohus. "*In The Regenerated Man*, we're going to have computer animation, matte shots, state-of-the-art morphing, and tons of make-up effects, all geared to doing a '50s-looking science-fiction film."

Bohus is no stranger to the world of low-budget monster movies. The Palisades Park-based film maker produced 1983's

The Deadly Spawn, a quirky monster movie about space creatures chewing their way through the New Jersey suburbs. It opened in New York City just two weeks after Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*. While eclipsed domestically by Raimi's splatter-thon, the film did well enough overseas to merit a 1989 sequel, *The Deadly Spawn II: Metamorphosis*. Legal problems kept the sequel from being released in the U.S., but it was a hit in Japan and other foreign markets. The film was recently acquired by Trimark Pictures (*Leprechaun*) and is scheduled for home video release, under the title *Metamorphosis: The Alien Factor*.

The Regenerated Man's tight, eighteen-day shooting schedule included a legion of live effects shots, designed and supervised by Vincent Guastini. "We have one gag which is real neat," said Bohus. "It's like a Spider-Man thing—the creature actually grows a pod out of the corner of his thumb, and it's a protruding vein-sack that shoots veins, like webbing."

Guastini, founder of the Jersey City-based Fantasy Workshop makeup effects lab, is a veteran of such genre film offerings as *Super Mario Brothers*.

"Basically, we had three-and-a-half weeks to come up with a miracle," said Guastini, between takes on the film's warehouse location. "We worked very, very hard; it was crazy. We wanted to give Ted the best quality work for the budget, and make sure it all looked as good as possible. It's wall-to-wall effects, as far as what we had to come up with. It's a character that changes into this mutated beast. His anatomy, basically in his face, is exaggerated. This drug does something to his genes which makes his brain protrude outside of his skull. What he can do is protrude his finger bones and 'fire' them at people, and 'fire' other pieces of his anatomy, as well. Almost like a mutated, Transformer-like monster. He's got veins that shoot out and wrap around people's heads, so he can reel them in and pull them apart. He has a tongue that comes out and sucks his victims dry. His arm splits open, the bone folds out and 'fires.' Some pretty wild stuff."

The creature is a walking, mutated jack-in-the-box. You don't know what's going to happen next.

Guastini was responsible for the dazzling makeup effects that still fit in with the film's '50s "creature-feature" design. "It kind of reminds me a little of Howard Hawks' *The Thing (From Another World)*," said Guastini "It's all basic make-up effects techniques, it just has more of an original twist to it than most recent horror films."

In keeping with the film's homage to '50s monster movies, actor Arthur Lundquist took appropriate steps in preparing for his star turn as *The Regenerated Man*. "I studied many of the films of Robert Clarke, such as *The Hideous Sun Demon* and *The Man From Planet X*," he said. "I also took some inspiration from *The Alligator People* and *The Creature Walks Among Us*. Those films had a particular flavor, that I'm trying to recapture, but not copy."

As part of the film's attempt to capture the imaginations of modern filmgoers, state-of-the-art technology is being utilized in key sequences of the film. For the climax, Dr. Clarke's fiancee (Cheryl Hendricks) and a fellow researcher (Andrew Fetherolf) fire a tranquilizer into the creature, inducing a massive growth surge that results in a 20-foot tall beast. *Metamorphosis: The Alien Factor* also featured a giant monster, so Bohus turned to Dan Taylor, the Baltimore-based effects artist who had handled the stop-motion monster for his previous film. "When *Metamorphosis: The Alien Factor* came along, that was a real opportunity to show what I could do in the feature film arena," said Taylor. "Most of the stop-motion I did up to that time was for TV commercials.

"About two years ago, I started to realize the full potential of computer animation," he said. "For character animation, though, I always thought computer animation had a tacky feel and moved sort of weird." However, after a visit to Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) during the initial phases of their ground-breaking computer animation for *Jurassic Park*, Taylor was sold on the virtues of the process. "I was amazed by how fast the technology was coming along," said Taylor. "I've been cramming and learning everything I can about computer animation. It's so similar to stop-motion, because you have computer 'skeletons' inside that are similar to armatures, and you have the flexible envelopes that are similar to the foam rubber exteriors of the models. To me, computer animation with characters is the natural evolution of stop-motion. When *The Regenerated Man* came along, Ted asked me to do the stop-motion on it, and I told him I'd rather take a crack at doing (the effects) as computer graphics."

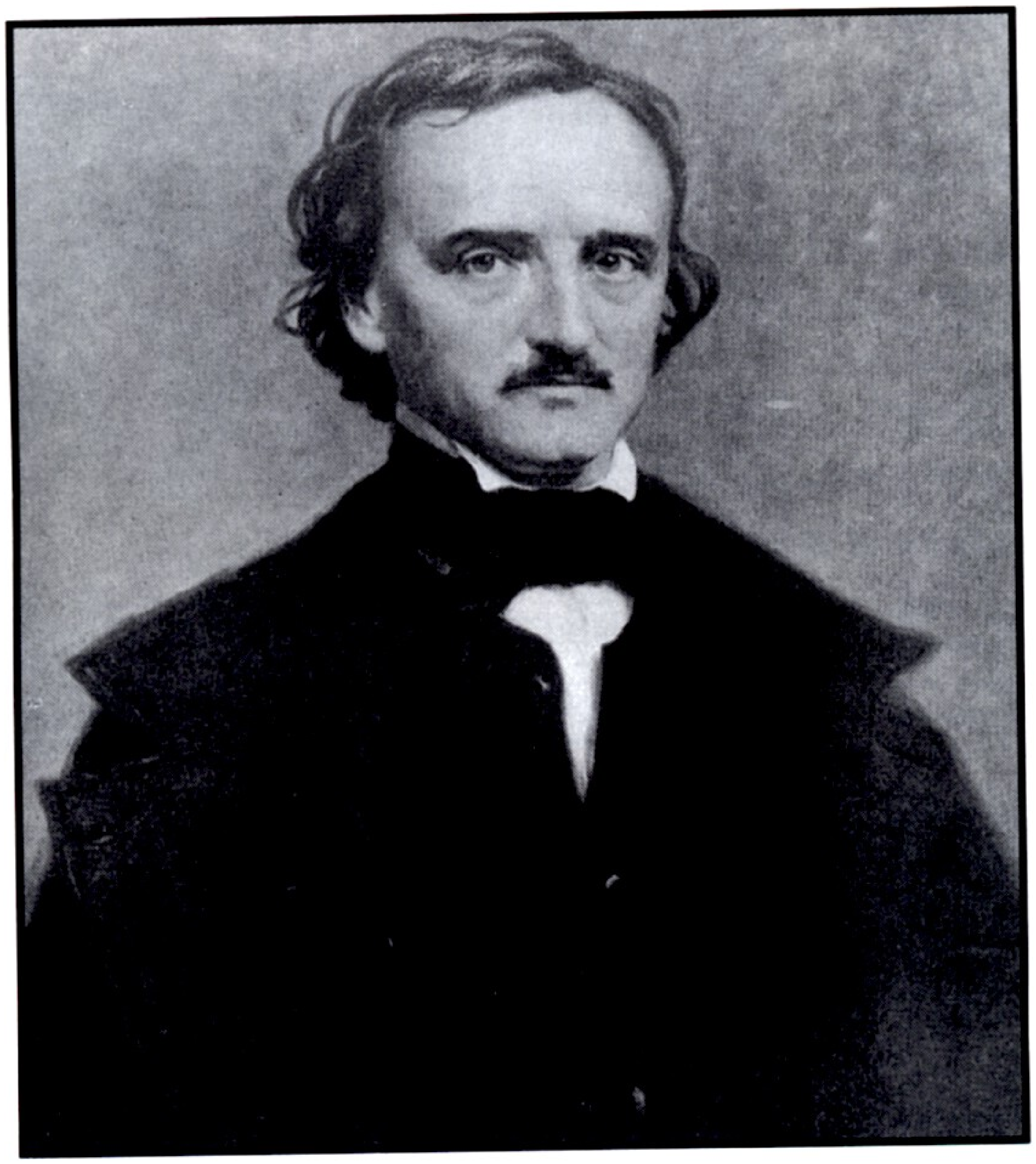
According to Taylor, this technology isn't just for the mega-budgeted, studio releases. "I think what a lot of low-budget producers haven't realized yet is that all the motion dynamics that were in *Jurassic Park* are available to them. Of course, there are certain things in that film that ILM wrote custom software for that's still not really available, but, you can get away with a whole lot. If you're shooting to the shadowy sides of things, and you gear your creature design to the computer, you can have the same range of movements (that were in *Jurassic Park*). If you're careful, this stuff can look really great."

Not all the planned effects for *The Regenerated Man* wound up being filmed. "Some things were cut out," said Guastini. "What's important is that we keep as many effects in the picture as we can. That's why we have so much going on with the creature. He's a walking, mutated jack-in-the-box; you don't know what's going to happen next. There are some gross moments, but it's not a blood bath."

Whatever the distribution fate of *The Regenerated Man*, Bohus believes he has the perfect marketing strategy for its Japanese release. "*The Deadly Spawn II* did so well over there, they should put it out as *The Deadly Spawn III: The Regenerated Man*," he said with a grin.✱

PBS Celebrates Horror Master Edgar Allan Poe

His name conjures up images of premature burial, black cats, forbidden crypts, and crumbling old houses where terrifying secrets dwell. Almost 150 years after his death, his prose and poetry continue to frighten, influence and inspire writers, composers, artists, poets, and readers all over the world. Filmmakers have attempted to capture his spellbinding works in their medium, but, surprisingly, comprehensive filmed versions of the tragic life of Edgar Allan Poe have been a rarity.



Edgar Allan Poe: Terror of the Soul is arguably the most ambitious film biography of this master of mystery and the macabre to date—a subject whose personal history was every bit as Gothic as some of his best-loved stories. Produced by Film Odyssey and presented by Thirteen/WNET in New York, the one-hour program reveals Poe's creative genius and personal experiences through dramatic recreations of important scenes from his works and life. The program is narrated by actress Ruby Dee (*The Stand*) and set to music by Peter Rodgers Melnick.

Highlights include compelling performances by actors Treat Williams, John Heard and Rene Auberjonois interpreting such Poe classics as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Cask of Amontillado." Poe's impact is discussed in interviews with such notable fans as writers Joyce Carol Oates and Ira Levin, critic Alfred Kazin, poet Richard Wilbur, biographer Kenneth Silverman, and composer Philip Glass, whose music is used to score the program's adaptation of "The Cask of Amontillado."

"To tell the story of one of the most engaging and entertaining of all American writers, we had to create a program that would transcend conventional film biography," said the program's executive producer, producer and director Karen Thomas. "The series of dramatic sequences featuring such talented actors is just one of many techniques we've used to make this program a fittingly evocative, romantic and haunting exploration of Poe. Although he died mysteriously when he was only 40 years old, his pioneering work inspired genres and set the tone for today's science fiction, detective stories and the fiction of psychological terror.'

"*American Masters* is known for its ability to get to the hearts—and minds—of important cultural icons, revealing both the personal and the creative attributes of people who have become lionized or mythologized in contemporary culture," said Susan Lacy, executive producer of *American Masters*. "The goal of the series is to reacquaint our viewers with their favorite writers, artists and other creators by putting them into a new and different perspective, and doing it in a way that is educational and entertaining."

Edgar Allan Poe: Terror of the Soul combines a unique blend of elements and features many of the breakthroughs for which *American Masters* has been cited. In addition to the dramatic sequences and interviews, the program uses rare archival portraits, footage of Poe's hometown of Richmond, his room at the University of Virginia, and his homes in and around Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York.

Born in 1809, Poe was haunted by tragedy throughout his life and the exact cause of his death in 1849 is still a mystery. According to popular imagination, fueled by the biographers of his time, Poe was a drunk who met his end in a gutter. *Edgar Allan Poe: Terror of the Soul* debunks that myth and shows how the writer, who remained a financial failure in his own lifetime, later became recognized for his extraordinary talent, celebrated by the French Symbolists after his death.

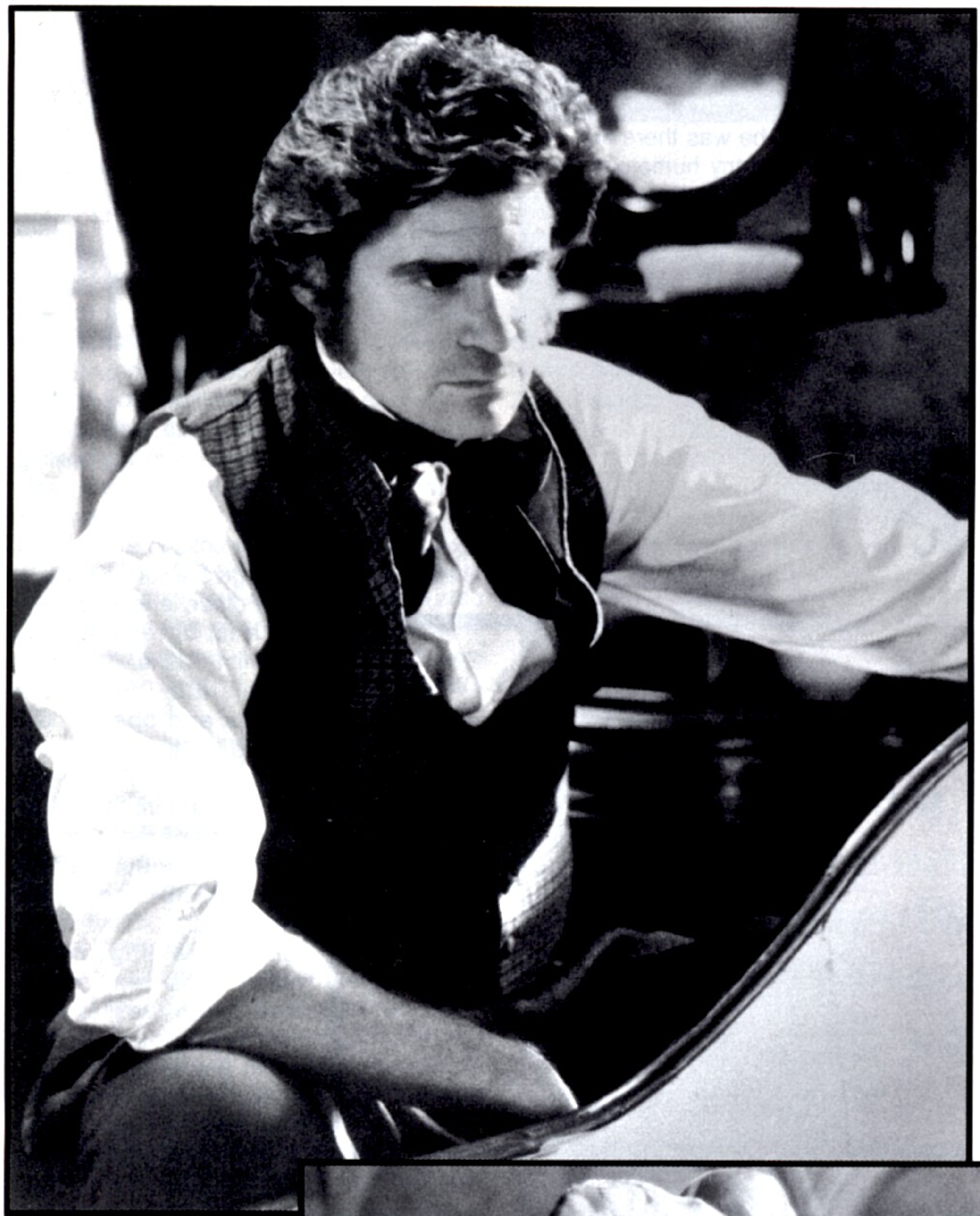
Orphaned at age three and disinherited by his foster father, Poe left home at 18 to attend the University of Virginia. When he left Virginia, he tried to do what no other American author of his time had done before—to make a living in literature. He entered the literary marketplace just as the Golden Age of Periodicals was about to begin and worked on the magazines of his day as a writer, editor and critic. But his fluent imagination, fraught with extravagant imagery and depth, compelled him to focus his energies on writing.

In a dramatic biographical vignette featuring actor Tony Maggio, who bears a striking resemblance to Poe, the program recreates the writer's recitation of "The Raven" before an enthralled audience. Other biographical vignettes depict the small family ceremony in which Poe marries his 13-year-old cousin Virginia, her death from tuberculosis in 1847, and Poe's own death. By the time of his wife's death, Poe had completed his best works. After her death, his life unraveled and he died just two years later. His struggle with alcohol and other demons is discussed in the program.

To keep the focus of the program on his prose, particularly the short stories, Poe's writings are punctuated with compelling footage of period iconography. The cellar in the actual home where Poe wrote "The Black Cat" traps the viewer in its damp, dark depths. A 19th century cemetery, a horse-drawn hearse, sepulchers, gravestones, underground crypts, and open tombs at the Westminster Church in Baltimore revive the horror of such stories as "The Premature Burial" and "The Pit and the Pendulum."

These works and Poe's many other contributions represent a legacy that is vibrant in contemporary culture, as evidenced by the testimonials of many prominent interview subjects featured in *Edgar Allan Poe: Terror of the Soul*. His innovative efforts in detective fiction are reflected by Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple and in the writings of Ira Levin. His science fiction achievements endure in the work of Ray Bradbury. His explorations into the nature of psychological terror continue in the works of Stephen King, Roger Corman and Thomas Harris (*The Silence of the Lambs*).

Edgar Allan Poe: Terror of the Soul includes on-camera interviews with con-



Opposite page, Horror master Edgar Allan Poe; above, Treat Williams in "Tell Tale Heart;" at right, John Heard (r) and Rene Auberjonois talk in "The Cask of Amontillado."

temporary writers, musicians and other artists who, nearly 150 years after Poe's death, assert a creative debt to his groundbreaking genius. In preparing the documentary production, producer/director Karen Thomas discussed with writers Ira Levin and Joyce Carol Oates and composer Philip Glass how Poe mesmerized and inspired them along their own paths to success.

A staple subject in the study of American literature, Edgar Allan Poe and his Gothic world of murder and mayhem creep into the psyches of most people early in life. "The Raven" recited before an audience of attentive school children. Or "The Fall of the House of Usher" assigned as mandatory reading just a few years later.

For a gifted few—perhaps the spiritual progeny of the writer whose tragic history is as mysterious and fascinating as some of his best-loved stories—an early introduction to Poe fast becomes a permanent intellectual and creative grasp on their fertile imaginations. Through them, the legacy of the man known in his day as a "mad genius" regenerates itself in bold and surprisingly contemporary ways.

Almost 150 years after Poe's death, his prose and poetry continue to frighten and influence writers, composers, artists, poets & readers all over the world.

Ira Levin, award-winning writer of the play *Deathtrap* and the novel *A Kiss Before Dying*, first became acquainted with the works of Poe when he was 14 or 15 years old. "He really did invent the detective story. There is nothing like it before, and everything that came afterwards really came from him," Levin said. "The Sherlock Holmes stories are very much patterned after the Dupin stories. In fact, when Holmes meets Watson, one of the first things Watson says to him when Holmes starts showing off his mental capacities is, 'You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin,' which was a very nice way of getting off the hook of plagiarism. But I don't want to knock Doyle, though, because I think about 50 years had gone by and nobody had the sense and the ability to pick up on what Poe had established."

Levin, whose other celebrated novels include *Rosemary's Baby, The Boys From Brazil* and *Sliver*, believes that Poe's works have paved the way for other literary genres as well, and continue to influence the writers of those genres today. "I can't imagine writing mysteries and not having read Poe at some point," he said. "Certainly he's an influence on everyone, directly or indirectly, who's working in, not only the detective story field, but also science fiction, ghost stories—any form of imaginative fiction, he was there first, really, and also wrote many humorous pieces and critical pieces. He really had an astonishing mind."

Joyce Carol Oates, best known for her novels *You Must Remember This, Them* and *Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart*, credits Poe with a more subtle influence. "The whole detective fiction enterprise has become so sophisticated, and it blends in with exciting, and I think very instructive, writings in forensic science—things that Poe is sort of groping for," she said. "He's like a pioneer. He's really like somebody who discovered a land, but he just discovered it, and other people come in and those cartographers have been there, and the geologists, and the geographers, and the botanists, and the biologists. So everyone's really staked out the territory that he just discovered. Therefore, he's been preempted."

According to Oates, there is an ageless quality to Poe's works that give them a strangely modern appeal almost 150 years after his mysterious death in 1849 at the age of 40. Orphaned when he was only three years old, Poe led a life marked by painful events, including the sudden death from tuberculosis of Virginia, his cousin whom he married when she was only 13 years old.

"Poe endures today because he had a genius for choosing images that are almost archetypal, but they're very, very idiosyncratic, too—the images of his great stories and the common fears, like of being buried alive, or being suffocated, being cut off from some center of nourishment, which could probably just be the mother," Oates said. "He may always be writing about that tragedy of being cut off from the mother and the source of life, but he's always writing about it in fresh, different ways so that we apprehend it anew, and that's why he endures."

Poe's influence has transcended literature, inspiring creative spirits working in other forms as well. Composer Philip Glass has turned two of Poe's most powerful works, "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom," into musical adaptations. He calls Poe the perfect collaborator.

"No one knew better than Poe that his readers would complete the work for him and that part of his art was in suggesting, never stating completely, what was really going on. You never really know," he explained. "The best collaborators, when they work together, give a lot of room to each other, and Poe gives you a lot of room to work with him. 'Usher' has been made into plays and movies and operas, and mine is not the first nor last opera on 'Usher.'"

"A Descent into the Maelstrom" became a dance theater piece with dancer/choreographer Twyla Tharp. "That was a very interesting experiment," Glass said. "What I tried to do was to do a piece in which the words, in which the music followed the text exactly, but the text was actually not spoken. So that when you got done with the piece, even though I had actually set the whole text to music, I took the text out."

Whether on the pages of a favorite book, on a canvas in one of the world's great museums, or echoed in a series of thrilling chords in a hushed concert hall, Poe's influence has been evident in the works of countless others throughout the ages. Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valery, Stephane Mallarmé, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Wallace Stevens inherited some of the literary magic of Poe. His brilliance is reflected in the images of artists Aubrey Beardsley, James McNeill Whistler, Edouard Manet, René Magritte, Arthur Rackham, Odilon Redon, Alfred Kubin, Paul Gauguin, and Gustave Doré. His voice can be heard in the music of composers Sergei Rachmaninoff, Claude Debussy, Sergei Prokofiev, Maurice Ravel, and Jean Sibelius. No doubt future generations will continue to be inspired, keeping Poe alive forevermore.✱

The Paperboy

Direct-to-Video/Pay-Per-View
Running Time: 93 Minutes
Directed by: Douglas Jackson
Screenplay by: David Peckinpah
Cast: Alexandra Paul, William Katt, Marc Marut

A stylish thriller, *The Paperboy*, a direct-to-video release (also being offered on certain cable pay-per-view outlets), is a worthy descendent of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

Like that landmark horror film, *The Paperboy* puts an all-American face on an unspeakable horror. Think of how many Spielbergian suburban fantasies include a scene of the paperboy delivering the news. He's as American as apple pie and the milkman.

The Paperboy is about the horrors of the breakdown of that suburbia and the unraveling of the American nuclear family.

Johnny, the local paperboy, (played with a restrained fury by Marc Marut) wants to create a new "family" to replace his dead mother and absentee father.

Johnny is Machiavellian in his pursuit of a family—the ends in his mind more than justifying the means. At the beginning of the film, when he matter-of-a-factly kills an elderly neighbor, it's only to force the old woman's daughter, Melissa (played by Alexandra Paul, pictured right) to return with her young daughter to her hometown for the funeral and to attend to the estate.

But his plans soon go awry. When the town "witch" begins to warn Melissa about the boy's evil nature, Melissa, at first, writes it off. However, when Melissa meets an old high school flame (played by former *America's Greatest Hero* star William Katt), Jealousy rears its head and dead bodies soon begin piling up.

Paul—best known to horror fans as the "other woman" in John Carpenter's adaptation of Stephen King's *Christine*—is just fine as a woman struggling to come to grips with her *own* losses.

But it's Marut's performance as Johnny that electrifies an already tautly and intelligently written and directed thriller.

If Norman Bates grew up in the suburbs, he'd be Johnny. The movie more than hints at the fact that Johnny's mother was a strict fundamentalist and disciplinarian.

Throughout the film, Johnny's desire to "be a good boy," actually brings a note of pity to the character. The film is successful in convincing you that Johnny may—like Norman—simply be a victim of his own unfortunate circumstances.

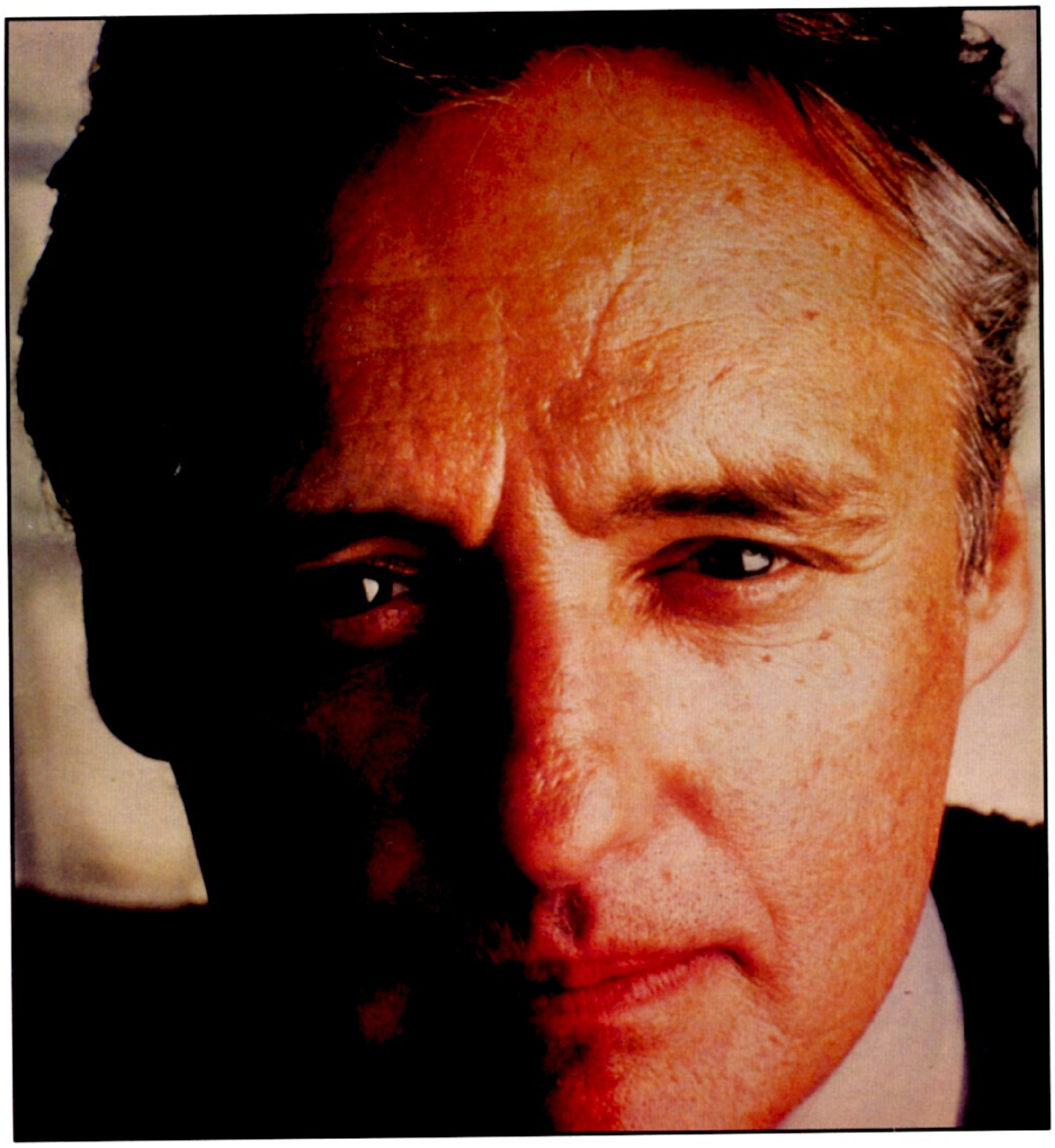
The Paperboy plays out its horror in deliberate and sustained fashion: it has far more fun making you uneasy rather than grossing you out.

An ideal example is Johnny's payback to the town "witch" who put a crimp in his plans. The scene is cleverly written so as to create tension without the need for extreme violence.

If you're a fan of *Psycho*, you'll appreciate the intelligence of *The Paperboy*.

—Anthony P. Montesano

Alexandra Paul—best known to horror fans as the "other woman" in John Carpenter's adaptation of Stephen King's *Christine*—is just fine as a woman struggling to come to grips with her *own* losses.



Dennis Hopper replaces Fred Ward as PI Philip Lovecraft.

Witch Hunt

Originally aired on HBO
Running Time: 98 Minutes
Teleplay by: Joseph Dougherty;
Directed by: Paul Shrader
Cast: Dennis Hopper, Penelope Ann Miller, Eric Bogosian, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Debi Mazar, Julian Sands.

The best part of this made-for-TV sequel from director Paul Shrader (*Cat People*) is the fake documentary which opens the film and deftly explains how magic became commonplace in this alternate version of 1950s Hollywood.

Less surreal than its predecessor *Cast A Deadly Spell*, *Witch Hunt* takes a good idea—parodying the House Un-American Activity investigations of the '50s as a *literal* Hollywood witch hunt—and tacks on a lackluster tale of political corruption.

Replacing Fred Ward as private investigator Philip Lovecraft is Dennis Hopper (pictured left), who walks through the lead role hardly able to focus on any of the other actors let alone vary his facial expressions or line readings.

The fight sequences and stunts other than the computer morphing effects are extremely fakey. And those morphing sequences, pretty much the film's only special effects, are getting old hat already.

—Judith P. Harris

ARCADE

Full Moon/Direct-to-Video
Running Time: 85 Minutes
Directed by: Albert Pyun
Cast: Megan Ward, Peter Billingsley, John DeLancie, Norbert Webster.

Arcade is basically a juvenile version of *Tron*. Many low-budget films rip off larger budgeted ones, but why pick a flop that didn't work all that well to start with?

This time several young teens are selected to try a new video game, and, as a reward, are given a home version. Unbeknownst to them, the game (a la *Brainscan*) is not only sentient, but evil. It sucks its young opponents into a virtual reality world and then finishes the game for good. No restarts.

It's a serviceable idea, but this movie just drones on and on forever. Maybe other obnoxious, self-absorbed, angst-ridden teens will be interested in these characters, but I just kept hoping that the game would wipe them out quicker.

The cast is capable enough, though Megan Ward was already too old for a teen role in *Crash and Burn*. John DeLancie enlivens his scenes as a company shill, but is largely wasted.

The film was released overseas in a different version than the one here, one that made even less sense and had much worse visuals. Dan Schweiger, a former *Cinefantastique* contributor, re-edited the project and assigned a new effects house to supply the CGI, making the film more coherent by dubbing in explanations along the way.

Consequently, the "unreleasable" film was rendered into something mediocre. However, the results were good enough that Schweiger has a shot at showing what he can do with a sequel.

—Dennis Fischer

The X-Men

Airs weekly on Fox
Running Time: 30 Minutes
Based on the characters from Marvel Comics

While the lacking the stylish gloom of *Batman* and *Spiderman and His Amazing Friends*' winning wit, Fox-TV's *The X-Men* injects a caffeine rush into an otherwise tepid Saturday morning line-up.

The series is smarter than much of its competition. Most animated programs banish topics like death, genocide, slavery, alienation, racism and sex from their table of contents; *The X-Men* embraces them. There was even a cameo by the openly gay crime-fighter Northstar.

In that sense, *The X-Men* is more than an alternative to limp Saturday-morning fare. It's an enema.

However, the show's opening chapters—"Night of the Sentinels, Parts I & II"—vividly exposed both the series' attributes and defects. On the plus side, the characters are precisely costumed. (Fans who cried foul when The Punisher was attired sans the trademark skull in his feature film needn't overtax their vocal chords here.) More importantly, the heroes' personalities are faithfully adapted. Wolverine, although slightly tamed by network television, remains fearsomely independent and barbaric; Gambit is typically hard up; the Beast has an inclination for poesy; Rogue (a dead ringer for songstress Bonnie Raitt) is sturdy on the outside, but all sugar at the core; Jubilee is a portrait of exultant teenhood; Professor X is humane and brainy; and Cyclops and Jean Grey drown the screen with confectionery. Ororo, however, is a washout. Considering the slew of "genetically challenged" (as comic book writer Peter David would say it) individuals sandwiched in less than 30 minutes—one episode had almost half the Marvel Universe appear—it's inevitable that some favorites would get lost in the storm.

The program earns negative points, though, for its pubescent dialogue and erratic animation. Cyclops yelling "Not!" to an oncoming Sentinel rates a nine on the *cringe* scale. Readers spoiled by the glossy penciling of John Byrne, Arthur Adams and Jim Lee will be dismayed with *The X-Men*'s spiritless art. In "Night of the Sentinels," the backgrounds were sloppily drawn, an obvious rush job which no doubt contributed to the show's initial postponement. The graphics have progressed with such episodes as "Come the Apocalypse" and "Days of Future Past"—the buildings no longer resemble storyboard doodles, the colors are sharper and the X-Men aren't as stiff as the action figures they inspired—but it's still sadly standard.

Those who received migraines from the *X-Men* comics' protracted and convoluted plots are going to make aspirin companies wealthier; *The X-Men* is just as continuity-obsessed as its four-color cousins. For example, the Beast was imprisoned at the beginning of one season; and wasn't released until two months later. References to previous installments are presented with merciless regularity.

Will kids take notice of these imperfections? Maybe, but probably not. After being served porridge such as *Darkwing Duck* and Super Dave the past few years, children and young adults are most likely reveling in the existence of cartoons that digress from the norm. Technical flaws are inconsequential to them; what's really significant is whether or not Wolverine "kicks butt," and he does. They're having fun, and rightfully so. The "Days of Future Past" episodes (based on two comic book epics), wherein the X-Men are obliterated in the future and a mercenary named Bishop time travels to prevent the massacre, were a gas.

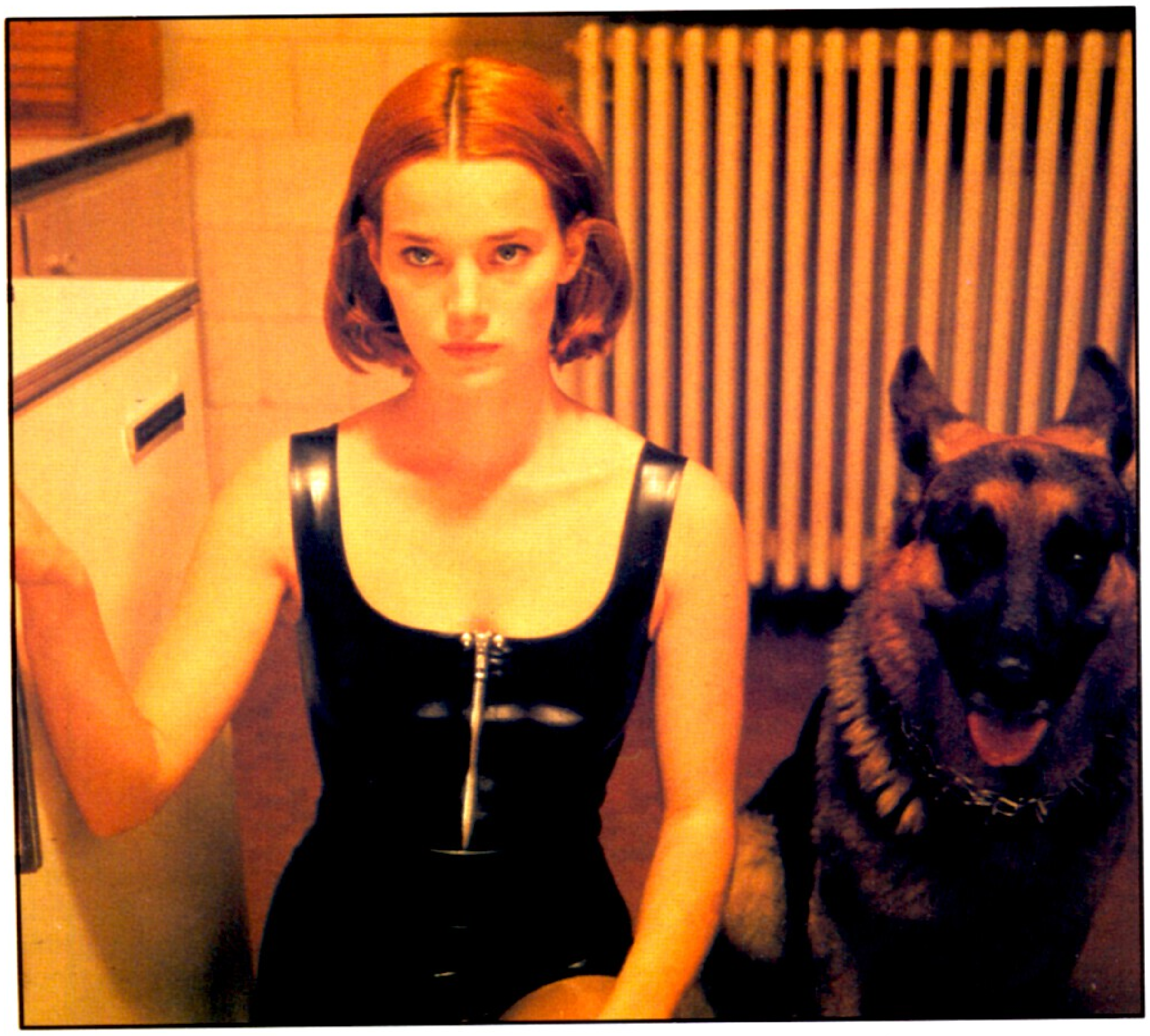
The scripts are usually brimming with panel-rattling fisticuffs. **—Michael Sutton**

Dark Angel: The Ascent

Paramount/Full Moon/Direct-to-Video
Running Time: 90 Minutes
Directed by: Linda Hassani
Screenplay by: Matthew Bright
Cast: Angela Featherstone, Daniel Markel, Nicholas Worth and Charlotte Stewart

Matthew Bright, whose screenplay for Tamra Davis' *Guncrazy* was one of the hidden lights among last year's independent films, has here written an even more unusual and satisfying script that combines the new-age spiritualism of *Ghost*, the gratifying vindictiveness of *Death Wish*, and the innocently bemused cultural commentary of *Splash*. The film's conceit sees Hell as a kind of working-class torture-chamber from which Victoria, a spirited young woman, rebels by finding a mystically sanctioned exit that lands her on earth, intent on doing God's work. Pure in heart, but coming from the wrong side of Heaven's tracks, Victoria's mission, involving the dispatch of a wide array of traditional and non-traditional sinners, doesn't at first please or convince either police or everyday citizens, even the doctor who has become mesmerized by her angelic purity and baffling paradoxes. But ultimately, with the help of a modern-day equivalent of the medieval *deus ex machina*, devilish virtue triumphs, although at the last moment rather too conventionally. Director Linda Hassani at first seems uncertain what tone might best suit this complicated and satisfying melange, which alternates between ironic comedy, graphic, straight-faced violence, and traditional romantic drama. But she soon finds her footing and has drawn from her lead, Sarah Brightman, a witty, luminous performance. Never resorting to the ornate occultism of most films involving Satanism, the film is a direct-to-video triumph that reflects the modern filmmaker's need to cross-pollinate genres.

—James M. Faller



Angela Featherstone and friend in *Dark Angel*.

Carnosaur II

Concorde-New Horizons/ Direct-to-Video
Running Time: 83 minutes
Directed by: Louis Morneau
Cast: John Savage, Cliff DeYoung, Ryan Thomas Johnson, Rick Dean

The usual flood of imitators generated by Hollywood to cash in on a blockbuster film is not new.

In 1950, the much ballyhooed *Destination Moon* was beat to the screen by the low-budget *Rocketship X-M*. In 1993, Roger Corman hit theater screens with *Carnosaur* a couple of months before Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* stomped into boxoffice history.

Now, Corman is trying to create a video franchise with *Carnosaur II*. Unfortunately this film rips off not *Jurassic Park*, but many of Corman's own lesser efforts.

The formula storyline finds a disparate group holed up in a claustrophobic, high tech environment while monsters run loose through the corridors and air shafts picking them off one by one. (Did someone say *Aliens*?)

Cliff DeYoung, as a government agent, leads a rescue team to the site to learn why communications have been cut off. This time, the Yucca Mountain Uranium Mine, a depository for high level atomic waste, 80 miles out in the desert, provides the locale and genetically grown dinosaurs the menace. An obnoxious teenage computer genius saves the day, obviously having seen the film *Dinosaurs*.

Jim Wynorski's silly *Dinosaur Island* was more fun.

—Dan Scapperotti

> *Dark Angel* combines the new-age spiritualism of *Ghost*, the gratifying vindictiveness of *Death Wish*, and the innocently bemused cultural commentary of *Splash*.

The Companion

Running Time: 120 min.
Originally aired on: USA Network
Teleplay by: Ian Seeberg
Directed by Gary Fleder
Cast: Kathryn Harrold, Bruce Greenwood, Talia Balsam, Joely Fisher, Brion James

The Companion is a science fiction romance set in some unspecified near-future when technology has advanced to the point of making androids who can pass for humans. It is about Gillian (Harrold), a writer of romance novels who has just come off a bad relationship. Her editor (Balsam) talks her into getting one of the new "companion" model androids, whom she names Jeffrey (Greenwood).

She and Jeffrey set out for a working vacation in a remote mountain location. At first Jeffrey is rather too robot-like, so Gillian re-programs him to have more personality and then more sensuality. Since he's as fully-functional as Star Trek's Data, soon they are making love, and she tinkers one last time with his programming to make him more spontaneous.

However, he has a machine's rigid idea of right and wrong, somewhat warped by reading Gillian's romance novels and his obsession leads him to keep her prisoner in her isolated mountain retreat as he starts bumping off anyone he perceives as a threat.

Bruce Greenwood is especially praiseworthy as Jeffrey. He starts off somewhat dorky looking with slicked back hair and a slight mechanical manner; then, with a minimal rearrangement of his hair, he becomes the ideal sensitive man, and finally, when he's erased part of his programming, in a romantic attempt at suicide, he loses control of his limbs and jerks around in a most alarming way.

There is other offbeat casting with Joely Fisher and Brion James as a couple, but the outstanding talent of *The Companion* is clearly writer Ian Seeberg, who has created a totally believable future with a crisply paced plot, neatly framed with commentary from a TV talk show, in which we find someone has actually learned something from the experience.

> *The Companion* is a science fiction romance set in some unspecified near-future where androids can pass for humans.

—**Judith P. Harris**

Cosmic Slop

Originally aired on HBO
Running Time: 85 Min.

SPACE TRADERS
Teleplay by: Trey Ellis
Directed by: Reginald Hudlin
Cast: Robert Guillaume, Michele Lamar Richards, Jason Bernard, Edward Edwards, George Wallace
THE FIRST COMMANDMENT
Written & Directed by: Warrington Hudlin
Cast: Nicholas Turturro, Efrain Figueroa, Richard Herd
TANG
Teleplay by: Kyle Baker
Directed by: Kevin Rodney Sullivan
Cast: Paula Jai Parker, Chi McBride

I had very low expectations for the unpromisingly-titled *Cosmic Slop*, but it turned out to contain more food for thought than appears on TV in a month.

Comprised of three episodes, linked by a three-eyed talking head with heavy *Twilight Zone* allusions, the most enjoyable of the trio was the first: *Space Traders*.

Aliens with a Max Headroom-like spokesperson who sounds like Ronald Reagan, make the United States an offer it can refuse: They will clean up all pollution and provide a limitless energy supply if all dark-skinned citizens are turned over to them in five days. To prove their powers, they turn the Statue of Liberty into gold.

The President sets up two 900-numbers so citizens can vote. Cabinet member Robert Guillaume rallies big business, who realize they will be losing a large chunk of their best customers. TV host Casey Kasem does an infomercial pointing out the potential loss to sports and jazz.

The script by Trey Ellis manages to catch not only the social implications and the moral dilemma but also the humor (George Hamilton volunteers to go as well). This is such a fascinating premise, it deserved a longer format.

The middle story, *The First Commandment*, also revolved around a subject seldom seen in primetime—religion. A Bronx parish is in trouble because the parishioners not only practice Catholicism but also Santeria. When their statue is taken to a museum, it disappears en route and returns as a living saint to challenge the faith of the local priest (Turturro).

The final story, *Tang*, again features a milieu seldom seen on TV—a welfare family, which is seconds away from violence. What happens when someone anonymously send guns and ammo to the ghetto?

Each story presents thought-provoking material and the acting was uniformly fine. It's heartening to see science fiction and fantasy used for biting social commentary—instead of just hardware and special makeups.

> It's heartening to see science fiction and fantasy used for biting social commentary—instead of just hardware and special makeups.

—**Judith P. Harris**

NOTHING TO FEAR
CONTINUED FROM P. 7

qualities which are rare enough in any medium.

And even with good writing, a standard television format imposes constraints which sabotage the escalating tension of a typical horror script. Commercial interruptions occur at close, regular intervals, providing predictable moments of emotional relief. All television dramas suffer as a result of this structural predictability, but the mood which must be sustained to achieve a sense of horror is particularly fragile. Its intensity is repeatedly undermined by reminders of the mundane, in the form of advertisements, newsflashes, and public service announcements. *The X-Files,* with its constant low-key tension, seems to be less susceptible to interruptions than more traditional horror series. But while its overall, Kafka-esque tone of anxiety and paranoia may be effective, it is not likely to be widely duplicated in prime time. The approach is unique enough to make imitations seem like, well, *imitations*. Subsequent horror series will have to explore original dramatic structures in order to compete.

Furthermore, the conventional series format requires a consistent, convincing premise which will allow viewers to suspend their disbelief week after week, and to continue to identify with the main characters no matter how fantastic the plots become. But how often can believable human characters be expected to encounter the sorts of situations that a horror series demands? Few programs have managed to solve this problem beyond the first few episodes (remember *Kolchak?),* but there have been a couple of notable exceptions. *The X-Files,* employing a premise which recalls the '60s alien-danger series, *The Invaders,* maintains credibility by placing its central characters in a situation where they may logically be expected to encounter the *same* sinister forces on a continuing basis. Although individual episodes explore a variety of supernatural phenomena, it is the recurrent fear of government concealment and complicity which holds the series together. This relatively plausible threat, along with the realistic air imparted by police-procedural plots, enhances the series' believability and allows us to empathize with the characters as they are confronted with one inexplicable event after another.

A more common solution to the problem of weekly continuity has been to avoid the issue altogether in an anthology format. This idea is sound enough in theory, but it has rarely worked. *Night Gallery, Ghost Story and Circle of Fear* occasionally offered episodes based on promising concepts, but almost always failed to be truly frightening. A limit of one hour (minus commercial time) allows for plot complexity only at the expense of solid characterization. Good horror depends on a high level of emotional involvement on the part of the viewer, a condition which is difficult to meet without the presence of familiar characters who have been allowed to develop over a period of time and in a variety of situations. We simply can't care enough to be really disturbed by the characters' distress.

> Good horror depends on a high level of emotional involvement on the part of the viewer

Even the actual hours of prime time may interfere with a horror series' effectiveness. Early evenings, in most households, do not provide the ideal atmosphere in which to experience horror. Dramatic tension is constantly interrupted by phone calls, family members and other domestic concerns. And then there's the problem of television scheduling. Can anyone settle down in anticipation of a really good scare after a game show? football? *Married with Children?* Even careful series placement is essentially ineffective, since there is no guarantee that viewers will remain tuned into one channel.

Changes in viewing habits may help to make prime time horrors more viable. Many ratings researchers now take "time-shifted" VCR viewing into account when compiling their statistics. Tape a horror show, watch it later (with the lights out and the kids in bed), and you can still contribute to that show's success in prime time, thus ensuring its survival. Unfortunately, however, VCRs probably do more to contribute to the demise of horror series. With uncut, commercial-free recent video releases available in virtually every corner store, horror fans can satisfy their tastes without having to tolerate the compromises of network television.

With all the restrictions placed on television horror, it's no great wonder that successful series have been rare and unsustainable. But, in spite of all these limitations, it must be said that television offers unique opportunities which, when skillfully exploited, can add a unique and effective dimension to horror. Television is the most intimate of all media. It enters our private domains and preys on our vulnerability when we are least guarded. It allows us to form long-term, personal attachments to its characters, and to share in their experiences in a way that would be impossible in a more public venue. When horror does work on the small screen, it can do so spectacularly.

Whether other shows will go on to match *The X-Files'* success remains to be seen. But with one hit horror show on the air, we can expect the genre to receive greater network attention in the near future. Successful or not, there will almost certainly be new horror series to be sampled, critiqued, and judged. And that, for horror fans, is good news indeed. ✱

ANGELS
CONTINUED FROM P. 21

Live Entertainment is marketing the CD-ROM and Alfred Haber Distribution is handling the sale of the special in foreign markets.

Angels II: Beyond the Light, hosted by actress Stefanie Powers, was shown in October and was scheduled for rebroadcast in June. It included more real-life stories and showed the influence of angels in fields like writing, music and sports. Former Heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield and musicians Carlos Santana and George Harrison were among those interviewed.

Since its founding in 1991, American Artists has sought projects that Hollywood might not do ordinarily. In the works are a TV special about the third millennium and a feature film about a Tibetan lama. "Part of the company plan is to do stories that open the heart," said Hauck, who added that "So far, we're being proven right by the audience." With the onset of technological progress, spiritual subjects were downplayed by society, said Hauck. "People are hungry for something spiritual." As for angels, Hauck is a believer. "They are absolutely there," he said. ✱

NEW OUTER LIMITS
CONTINUED FROM P. 15

developed for warfare turns out to be a miracle cure. His businessman brother (Martin Kemp) decides to use the discovery for his own purpose. Number Three is "Under the Bed," written by Larry Meyers, which, next to the two-hour "Sandkings," raised the most excitement among the Vancouver production crew. Farkas designed a full body suit for a midget to portray the bogeyman; yet his handiwork was more or less deliberately blurred by the special effects (see related story) that would keep the monster shrouded in an air of mystery, leaving the viewer to wonder just what it was that was hiding under the bed. "Second Soul," written by Alan Brennert and based on his short story, stars Michael Williams (*Forrest Gump*) and Rae Dawn Chong (*Quest For Fire*) in a tale about alien spirits who journey to Earth to escape their plague-ravaged world. In order to survive on their new planet, they must inhabit the bodies of the dead. So in an effort to reach out to these newcomers, the government donates dead corpses to serve as hosts. The story deals with how one man reacts to seeing the body of his friend, now inhabited by an alien being. Manny Coto's own script, "Symbiosis," deals with a creepy house in an otherwise normal neighborhood. People think the house is haunted but in fact a secret science experiment is going on inside and the house is actually a living organism that feeds on humans. Coto, who shares co-executive production responsibilities with Jonathan Glassner (they actually switch off every episode), says his inspiration came from the sci-fi novels of the 1930s such as Edmund Hamilton's *The Man Who Evolved*. "They're very classic and simple." He also holds a fondness for works like Stanley Weinbaum's *Martian Odyssey*—"stories that delighted taking you to strange places." Glassner's script, meanwhile, which will appear in "Prototype," deals with a female robot designed and built as a pleasure machine for men, but decides to take matters into her own hands. As the new year began, production in Vancouver was, amazingly, running on schedule with "Virtual Future," a story by Shawn Alex Thompson in which Josh Brolin plays a student who invents a virtual reality machine that falls into the hands of a greedy industrialist. Coto says that as a true lover of the sci-fi genre, he couldn't be in a better place than the Bridge Studios at Vancouver this year. "It's like doing a major feature each week."

"The medium is changing," said Pen Densham, "but the thread that doesn't change is human nature." ✱

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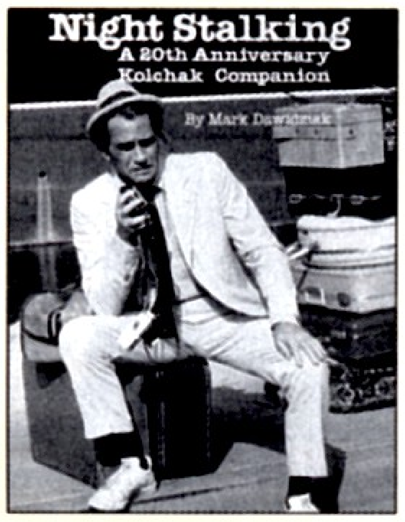

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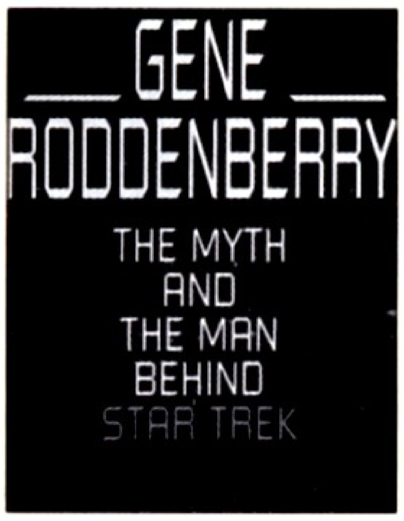

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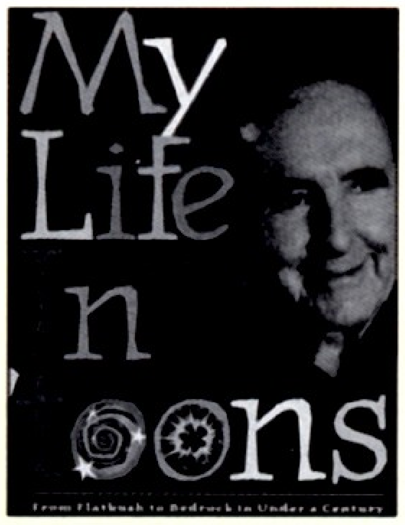

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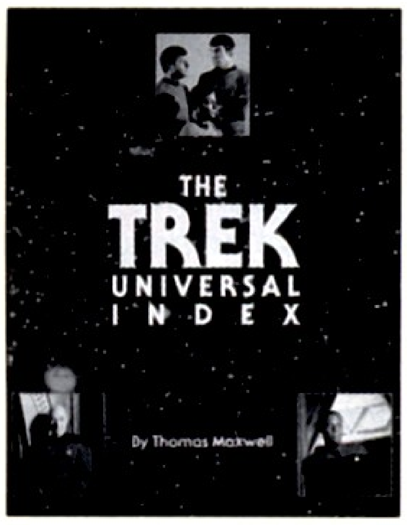

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SHOWTIME SCI-FI
CONTINUED FROM P. 19

wanting to direct since age eight, when his father took the family on a VIP tout of Warner Bros. "Seeing them shoot *The Great Race* on a huge sound stage, with one of the cars on a big floating iceberg, a humongous tank of water and all these giant fans. I had no idea that everything was created. I thought if you wanted to shoot a storm, you waited for a storm. But I was just mesmerized with it all, and from that moment on, I took over the family 8mm camera and started making my own Dracula movies with neighborhood kids." One of the scenes is set in Forbidden Planet Books, because Irvin specifically wanted to. "It's one of my favorite stores, being a sci-fi buff and book collector. It's something near and dear to me. I've spent plenty of hours in this store and others like it. Originally in the script the characters were supposed to go to a video store to find out about the movie *Escape From Uranus* that never got completed. And I just felt if you were going to seek out information about an obscure sci-fi movie, you gotta go to the source."

Although shooting in the store—jammed with books, comics, posters and props—is going smoothly, Irvin noted one consideration, "With so many brand-name things like *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and *Batman* that we don't have the budget to pay for rights to feature in close-tips with actors, we have to keep our distance. We are featuring one poster, one of my films, *Oblivion*."

He appreciated the tone of this and his other projects. "All the films I've done have been genre films, but they've all had a very quirky sense of humor. This is probably the most comic one. It's more like a sci-fi version of *After Hours*, the Scorsese picture. It's about a guy who gets sucked into this world, *a la Alice In Wonderland*, where he's surrounded by crazies and doesn't know who are aliens, and some of the humans are weirder than the aliens. Also, I'm a huge fan of the *Thin Man* movies, with Nick and Nora Charles, and I had a lot of fun with these actors playing around with that sort of chemistry."

Bill Campbell admitted he's not a fan of '50s and '60s sci-fi "except for some of the better folks like Heinlein" but still enjoyed the quality of his character. "It's related to the more heroic types I've done for sure, but it's a lot more fun because it's comedy. Not that *The Rocketeer* wasn't comedy, but it's a different quality. This is one of the nicest crews I've ever worked with, and that comes right down from tile top. Larry Estes is a really terrific person and I trust his taste—he's the reason I got into doing this."

Campbell considers the project valuable, "Just in terms of me personally, my own growth in what I do, it's just part of the ongoing process of learning. Every time I do something, I learn. It's not like I used to be when I wasn't paying attention—now I am. And I'm starting to get comfortable with comedy—I don't mean in a bad way—complacent, but comfortable enough to really kind of do it enough to please myself. So this film is helping a lot." Wendy Schaal *(Red Shoe Diaries*) plays the daughter of the missing photographer who took the UFO pictures discovered by Campbell's character. Her real father was in *Slaughterhouse Five*, and she went with him to the shoot in Prague. "We were supposed to be there for ten days, and were there for five weeks. So I read a lot—Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury—I like that more heady kind of science fiction, not the monster stuff.

"My 12-year-old son does like the monsters and all the stuff on the dark side, like *Tales From the Crypt*, and swears it's not going to bother him, not scare him, but if I go just a little over the line, he's up in the middle of the night and into my room. There's a lot of material here [in the Forbidden Planet bookstore] that's really on the dark side of human nature, not so much sci-fi, but really icky. There's stuff here I would never let him look at. And he thinks I'm just ridiculous. He's 12 and I'm just letting him see some PG-13 movies, where all his friends have seen every R movie and all that.

"But in terms of what the real influence is, who knows? I haven't done any big study on it. But just the image of standing next to my son while he flips through a magazine with girls with black leather pasties and G-strings on, while snakes are wrapping around, you know, sucking their blood—this does not feel motherly to me. So I go by that."

She notes the story of *Out There* has some elements of '50s sci-fi movies, but does not have such stereotyped female characters. "I'm playing a dentist, and I'm really taking this adventure in hand. I'm going out there and doing everything I can to find my father. So she's not wimpy. But I'm doing this adventure with a tall, dark, good-looking man [Campbell], and in every scene I say 'What do we do now? Where do we go? What's next?' That part of it is a stereotype—I leave it up to him to do all the decisions. So we have a little of both going on."

Schaal said she has done a lot of comedy. "I used to play real girl-next-door, sweet characters, then I played these off-the-wall, kind of hooker-with-a-heart kind of things, but in a comic way, real colorful. In *Amazing Stories* I played a porn queen. But mostly I've done comedy, sit-coms like *It's A Living*, and all the movies have had that light comic tone." ✱

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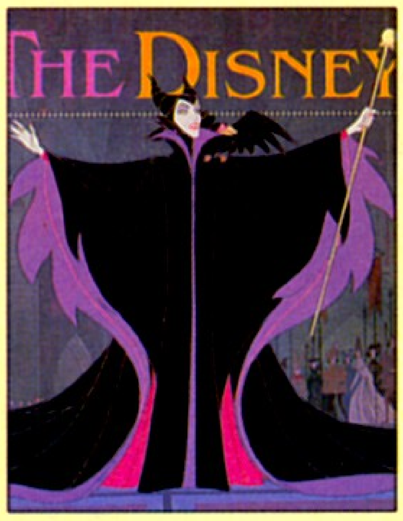

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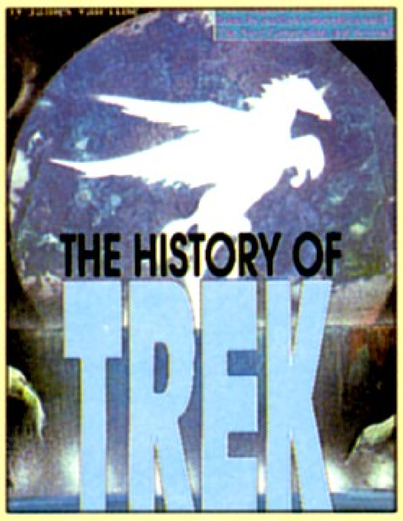

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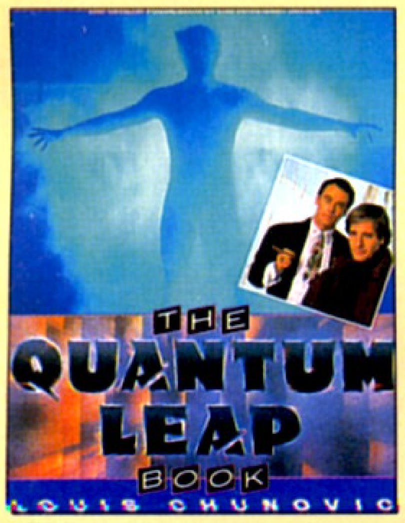

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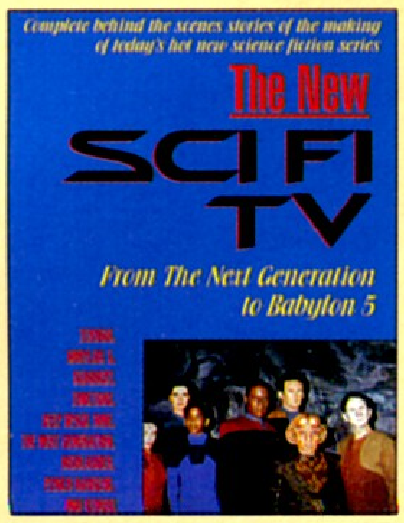
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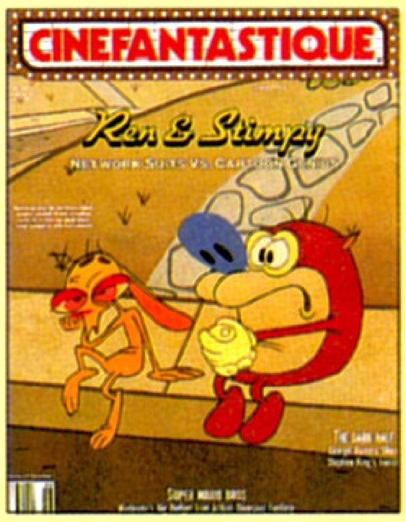

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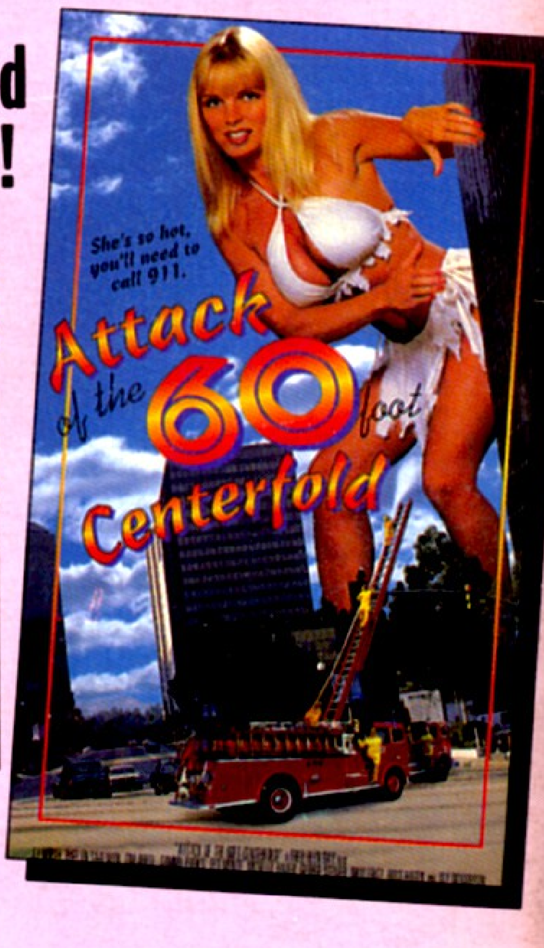
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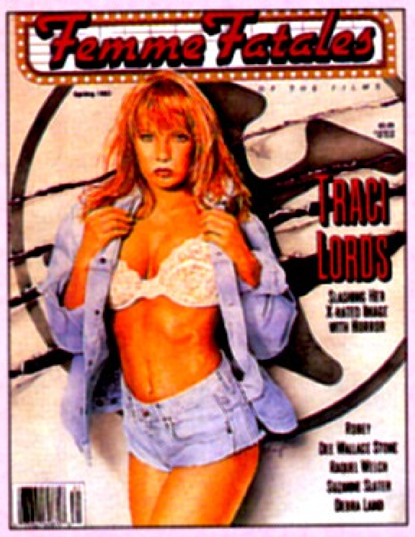

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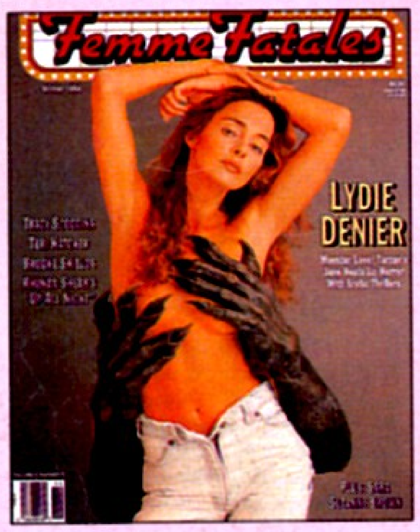

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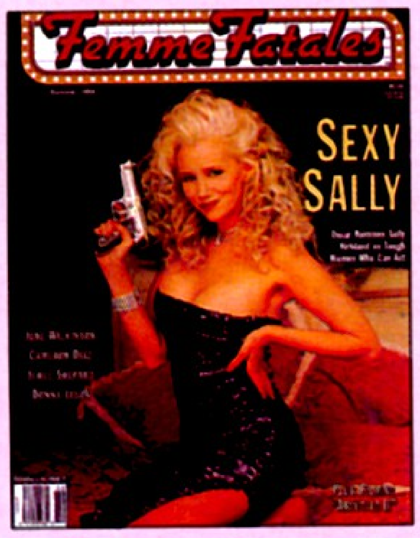

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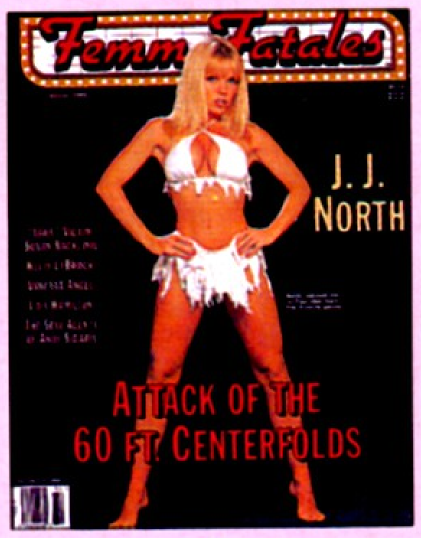

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